

A PROPOSED NEW STRUCTURE FOR THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
POST-SCHISM BASED ON CELTIC CHRISTIANITY

A Practical Research Project
presented to
the Faculty of
Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by
Rev. Denyse Barnes
May 2023

This Practical Research Project, completed by

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has been presented to and accepted by
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ABSTRACT

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This study seeks to address the impending split of the United Methodist Church (UMC) brought about by ongoing schism over differences in theology and practice related to the full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ clergy and laity in the ministry and life of the church. There are many diverse communities who call the UMC home and a number of those are not well represented in the life and leadership of the church. This paper works towards creating a community where all are truly valued, welcomed, and affirmed but concentrates specifically on the LGBTQIA+ community as they are the ones who are currently specifically excluded.

This study proposes a structure based on the ministry practices of Celtic Christianity for a new Methodist denomination that seeks to embrace full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ clergy and laity in the ministry and life of the church by addressing some of the challenges facing the UMC as it seeks to bridge theology and practice in areas of worship, spiritual care, mission, and outreach in ways that reflect full inclusion of all people, especially those who have been excluded and marginalized.

I am an ordained clergy in the UMC and a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. I was commissioned in 2018 and ordained in 2020 despite the current regulations regarding ordination of queer clergy. My appointment is in the California-Pacific (Cal-Pac) annual conference of the

UMC, a more progressive culture (although still with many issues of lack of inclusion and representation for all) than many other conferences of the church. I am appointed as Director of Justice and Compassion Ministries for the conference where much of my work is with task forces and strategy groups created to work on injustices both inside and outside of the institutional church.

I have spent much time working within the queer community both inside and outside of the church, seeing and experiencing first-hand the level of harm done to a community of people by the church institution. As a queer clergyperson myself I have received much abuse, discrimination, and faced challenges not placed before cis-gendered heterosexual clergy in similar positions and situations as myself. The hurt and pain caused to this community has manifested itself in many ways. People are left feeling unworthy and less than, sinful and believing they are going to hell. This is often exacerbated by the reactions of family and friends resulting in rejection from families and churches alike. It takes a large amount of pastoral care, nurturing, and teaching to help these people find their value, worth, and identity as beloved children of God.

I was purposeful in ensuring I accessed and highlighted research materials prepared by those authors who embody the intersectional nature of this project. I spent much time researching the structure of the UMC and of Celtic Christianity in order to create a structure which serves more fully the local context of churches and is not governed by rules and systems which make change, progress, mission, and outreach challenging and difficult to achieve.

I believe that the circular structure developed as a result of this study more adequately addresses the issues of inclusion, affirmation, and full membership for the LGBTQIA+ community within the context of geographical location. The addition of a mobile element to the

ongoing work allows the church to take itself to the people rather than expecting them to come to a building from which they have been excluded for many years. In a fast moving and often changing world, rapid response and outreach is needed for the church to remain a vital and loving presence, and this new structure will enable that to happen more effectively, and with love, grace, and compassion as we are called to be as Christians.

Dedication

For my mother Chlodia and Deborah

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Abbreviations

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Cal-Pac	California Pacific Annual Conference
GC	General Conference
BoD	Book of Discipline
C of E	Church of England
AC	Annual Conference
C of B	Council of Bishops
Jud.C	Judicial Council
Commission	Commission on the Way Forward
JC	Jurisdictional Conference
CC	Central Conference
Protocol	Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation
WCA	Wesley Covenant Association
GMC	Global Methodist Church
GCFA	General Council on Finance and Administration
DC	District Conference
CT	Connectional Table

Chapter One - Introduction

The UMC faces schism over differences in theology and practice, this time particularly over the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ clergy and laity in ministry and life of the church. It now seems inevitable that whenever the global church is able to reconvene (stalled due to the Covid-19 pandemic and now rescheduled for April 23rd to May 3rd 2024) that the church will split into at least two, but possibly as many as five new denominations.

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This has had an impact across the board for the global church. Attendance and engagement in many local churches has been impacted by the perception of the general public of the UMC.¹

The systemic issues in the UMC have meant that the routes available for finding an option to resolve our issues are long, slow, and cumbersome. This has resulted in further ostracism of those excluded, as well as churches becoming impatient and frustrated with the processes and opting to leave before a final decision has been reached through General Conference (GC).

Heterosexism is not the only “ism” of which the church is guilty. For many years women were not allowed in the pulpit and still today the disparity in pay between male and female clergy is significant. Racism is endemic with little thought being put into ways in which black and brown people can be included, represented, nurtured, and grown in their life in the church and service to God. Ableism is another area in which churches fall short. Many sanctuaries are

¹ When conducting listening posts and interviews across the Cal-Pac conference of the UMC with both clergy and laity, the findings reflected the perception of the church by laity both inside and outside of the organization as one who do not get along, cannot navigate disagreements well, and who are not welcoming to all people.

not accessible, large print bulletins and sermons are not readily available, and often there is no audio loop or sign language interpreter made available. Various general agencies of the church track these statistics – the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW,) the General Commission on Race and Religion (G CORR,) and the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM.)

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If the church truly wants to grow and “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world,”² then it needs to become a place where all are truly welcomed, valued, and fully included in every aspect of the church’s life.

Another consequence of this exclusionary behavior is found in the fact that many of those people who have been ostracized will not come into church buildings because their pain and memories are too deep and hurtful. In order to help people become part of the body of Christ and understand their worth and value, the church has to leave their brick-and-mortar locations and go to them where they are (Skid Row, queer community gathering places, etc.) and work diligently at making them understand that the gospel message is for them also.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added to this outflux of people from the church building itself. Many now worship online at times which is more convenient for their schedules. Small groups have sprung up and people have delved more deeply into spiritual practices and ways of connecting with the divine, which gives them meaning and help as they seek understanding for the changes occurring across the globe. This increase in spiritual practices as being preferred over corporate worship services is one to which the church must pay attention.

² United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church: 2016* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 227.

The monolithic hierarchical structure of the UMC needs to be flattened and localized so that those local communities can be served within their own context. The structure of Celtic Christian communities (part of my own heritage) is built specifically around this model with small communities served by a single larger monastery which links together all the local communities and services within an area, thereby sharing resources and expertise with each other.

Providing a vehicle (such as the **SHIFT** truck – a new developing ministry of the Cal-Pac Conference named for the shift from our churches to outside of our buildings) which will allow provision of services and mission work in a complete unit traveling around to the people it is trying to serve, rather than expecting the people to come to them, will help meet the needs of those people who have felt excluded from traditional churches and large over-administered bureaucratic organizations.

In *The Book of Discipline* (BoD) of the UMC the harmful language “homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching”³ was added in the 1970s. This book constitutes both the law and doctrine of the UMC. It has been used both as a tool for organization and order, as well as for causing harm and damage to many people. The book has changed and grown significantly with each passing GC (which is where changes are made). An addendum to this book was added after the special called GC of 2019 where the term “self-avowed practicing homosexual”⁴ was defined more definitively with the result of being even more exclusionary and harmful to the queer community. This conference also produced further rules around complaints and judicial and legislative action which could be taken against those who identify as part of the non-hetero

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³ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline*, 304.

⁴ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline*, 226.

white normative world which many in the Christian world use as a de facto standard for acceptability by the Divine.

In addition, the UMC has become a victim of its own success in terms of its global presences, as it fails to respond to the changing needs of the global community, both where it is present and where it aims to serve. A lack of understanding of the changing culture means a lack of understanding of the spiritual needs and without that comprehension, change is slow to occur, particularly in an organization which has become so unwieldy that its own rules prove to be a barrier to the very changes it must work at bringing about.

There are many books written on the language used in scripture (the Holy Bible, consisting of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament) to either challenge or justify the exclusion of the queer community from full acceptance into the Christian church. Each of these books addresses only one of the viewpoints exclusively, and there is much commonality between their content. This controversy within the church is not a recent phenomenon and can be traced throughout history through science, culture, and religion and from each of these individual stances and worldviews. In *A Queer History of the United States*, Michael Bronski examines the effects society, culture, and science have had on religion's traditional view of homosexuality and how the popular media (particularly television) influenced organized religion's stance on LGBT inclusion. He states that following the country-wide cultural acceptance (from media portrayals) of strong masculine males and glamorous affluent females, "The next step was religion sold as entertainment. [These decades] [1960's and 1970's] saw a rise in populist religious figures who preached a distinctly American, heterosexual gospel."⁵

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⁵ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, ReVisioning American History (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2011), 140.

Living Faithfully by David Barnhart et al. is a four-week small group study designed to offer perspective on all viewpoints of the conversation for churches trying to make the decision about where they stand with regards to the current argument raging in the UMC. It contains good summaries of all that has happened historically around this debate and offers well-balanced perspectives on the different stances taken in response, including details of the Special Called GC of 2019. The book explains the language used in the BoD, including pointing out that the Episcopal Greetings to the 2016 issue of the BoD contains the words that it is not “sacrosanct or infallible.”⁶

In a similar vein, Mark Wingfield in *Why Churches Need to Talk About Sexuality* explores the lessons learned when his church went through the process of discussing their own stance on full inclusion to the LGBTQIA+ community. In this he explains some of the challenges facing members as they started to open up and speak with each other and how deeply challenging this is, as one member commented that “People feel like whatever they learned about their faith they learned from their grandparents, and now they feel like everything they were taught is being made not true.”⁷ For UM churches this has become a deeply emotional and entrenched problem from which many are not prepared to change their own viewpoint as it challenges the very faith with which they were raised.

In *Walking the Bridgeless Canyon*, Kathy Baldock explains the research she has done into the use of the word “homosexual” in the Bible, where and why it first came into use, and the translations from which it came originally. Her work looks at the original Greek and Hebrew

⁶ David Barnhart et al., *Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and the United Methodist Church*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), 12.

⁷ Mark Wingfield, *Why Churches Need to Talk about Sexuality: Lessons Learned from Hard Conversations About Sex, Gender, Identity, and the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019), 31.

words and traces back how they have been translated and interpreted throughout the ages, including the first time that the word was printed in a Bible. She discovers that we do not have language which fits exactly with the sense of the two words most commonly used to label queer people as sinful in the eyes of God: “As used by Paul in the first century, *arsenokoitai* likely means pederasty. Pederastic relationships, inherently abusive and exploitative, are not equivalent to committed, loving, and monogamous same-sex relationships today.”⁸

Jane Nickell’s book *We Shall Not Be Moved*, examines who holds the power structures within the UMC and how these structures are inhibiting the global church from moving forward and finding a resolution rather than facing schism. Nickell’s posits that “The democratic nature of the Methodist General Conference allows for a participatory decision-making process but one that is drawn out and difficult, because of the way ingrained power relationships resist change.”⁹ Her book was written before the pandemic of 2021, which has only served to highlight the issues she raises regarding the power structures and inequities.

As John Wesley’s faith and commitment to living a holy life grew and developed into Methodism, he faced a great deal of opposition from both the Church of England (C of E), the Oxford University where he was studying and teaching, his family, and many prominent people in the community. Despite (or maybe because of) this he renewed his commitment to helping those not served by the church in prisons, hospitals, and the wider community, even causing

⁸ Kathy Baldock, *Walking the Bridgeless Canyon: Repairing the Breach between the Church and the LGBT Community* (Reno, NV: Canyonwalker Press, 2014), 235.

⁹ Jane Ellen Nickell, *We Shall Not Be Moved: Methodists Debate Race, Gender, and Homosexuality* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 175.

outrage as detailed by Stephen Tomkins in *John Wesley: A Biography*, when he extended his help to a man in prison for homosexuality.¹⁰

Wesley started field preaching, going out to bring the gospel message to the people in the places where they were, according to Heitzenrater in *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, to people who “could not or would not go to a church at the appointed hours for services.”¹¹ From this work societies and bands grew. These were small groups of people gathering weekly to prayer and study scripture together, developing their faith and community in places the C of E had not been able to reach, and were lead by laity rather than ordained clergy.

In many ways this practice mirrored that of Celtic Christianity, which developed in the British Isles when the gospel message reached the pagan and rural peoples of those countries. Stephen Platten and Christopher Lewis in *Flagships of the Spirit*, describe the structure of a Celtic Christian community as being “structured on a tribal and monastic basis whereby the abbot of the monastery, ...managed the local churches, while the bishop was a simple monk, with no more say in the monastery, or in the district, than any other monk.”¹² The abbot was sometimes clergy and sometime laity but always elected by the community according to their gifts and graces in leadership rather than any episcopal authority. This structure followed the localized form in which those people organized themselves as described by Diarmaid MacCulloch in *Christianity The First Thousand Years*, where there was no “central authority, ...and instead there was a large collection of groupings (tuatha).”¹³ The book goes on to further

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¹⁰ Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003), 38.

Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 110.

¹² Stephen Platten and Christopher Lewis, *Flagships of the Spirit: Cathedrals in Society* (London: DLT, 1998), 41.

¹³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York, NY: Viking, 2010), 331.

explore how Christianity developed within such an environment and also how, because of the itinerant nature of those people who evangelized throughout the land as they travelled, “there grew a network of Christian communities intimately involved in the life of each grouping, fostering Christian life throughout the island.”¹⁴

The Celtic way was to take church to the people rather than basing it around buildings and expecting people to come to them. The pandemic has rediscovered this practice with many people finding spirituality in nature and the outdoors and developing their own ways of communicating with the divine source rather than attending organized worship services in church buildings or online. People have come to understand a great need for community during these times, but one based around small groups working together with lay leadership rather than larger communities led by a single clergy.

In Davies and O’Loughlin’s translation of *Celtic Spirituality*, they explain how Christianity drew on the localized pagan practices and melded with them to create a spirituality and practice which is in “close dialogue with nature rather than withdrawn from it, ...where the presence of God could be felt and discerned in the natural and human landscapes of our world.”¹⁵ This takes worship and mission outside the walls of the church building and into the created world in a way that has not been practiced well by organized religion for many years and has been opened up to people as a result of the pandemic, creating a community similar to that which developed into Celtic Christianity and which is a “more holistic, ecologically sensitive, and inclusivist Christianity.”¹⁶ This works as a basis for a new model for the UMC where small

¹⁴ MacCulloch, *Christianity*, 331.

¹⁵ Oliver Davies and Thomas O’Loughlin, eds., *Celtic Spirituality*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1999), 3.

¹⁶ Davies and O’Loughlin, *Celtic Spirituality*, 8.

communities gather together pooling resources and ideas to practice their faith through both spiritual practices and mission as a complete package rather than separate disconnected projects.

Many of the stories of the saints found in Celtic literature such as Bradley's *Following the Celtic Way*, Simpson's *Celtic Christianity*, and Rees' *A Dictionary of Celtic Saints*, detail stories of the journeys taken by saints, monks, and laity which were felt to be a part of their calling in the search for right relationship with God. Simpson describes how "they left homeland and friends, all of life's securities in order that they might set out into an unknown journey for God,"¹⁷ taking Christianity to the people and adapting it to form part of the new culture using the traditional aspects of the old to develop an inclusive community which welcomed and included all.

Following this example, the creation of the SHIFT truck allows the church to take Christian mission, outreach, and evangelism to the people where they are, rather than expecting them to come to the church building itself. This is a tangible example of the ways in which different church communities and outside organizations came together in serving those for whom the church has not previously been a welcoming place, thereby providing a tangible implementation of this new structure.

Change is difficult for people, particularly when living in pandemic times when so much is different, and people yearn for the comfort and security of the old and familiar ways. For the UMC to flourish, it must become endogenous – growing from the culture where it is planted and being fed and nurtured by those people. The introduction of Christianity into the pagan world of the British Isles was successful because "no hand of bureaucracy was being imposed, structures

¹⁷ Ray Simpson, *Celtic Christianity: Deep Roots for a Modern Faith* (Vestal, NY: Anamchara Books, 2014), 80.

altered to suit changing needs, and bishops fitted in to a monastic system with its own natural leaders. Yet through all the change, unity and continuity was maintained.”¹⁸

Theological Stance

There are two pieces of scripture which underpin the theology of this project:

1. Mark 12:29-31, “Jesus replied, ‘The most important one is *Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength.* The second is this, *You will love your neighbor as yourself.* No other commandment is greater than these.’”¹⁹

Throughout his ministry Jesus made it clear that the message of God’s love was for all of humankind and that our call as part of the body of Christ was to be vessels of that love to all we encounter. When the church excludes people in any way, it is not following this message and is doing harm to the very people to whom it is called to serve, include, and minister to.

2. Micah 6:8, “[God] has told you, human one, what is good and what the LORD requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God.”²⁰

We are called to do justice for all people as we walk our journey on this planet, justice for all people in all places and at all times. We are called to go out and serve in every place we can, bringing the message and faithful love with us to all we encounter in whatever proves to be the most accessible method for those people in that time and place.

¹⁸ Simpson, *Celtic Christianity*, 246.

¹⁹ Mark 12:29-31 (CEB).

²⁰ Micah 6:8 (CEB).

Methodology

The project consists of two components. The first part being research from books, articles, and academic writings on the UMC and Celtic Christianity resulting in a new proposed format of structure and model for the portion of the UMC created post-schism which is designed to offer a welcome to all of God's children.

The second component is the practical implementation of a pilot of the SHIFT truck where funding was gained via conference resources to purchase a bus which could be refitted to meet the needs of the project and take it out into the community in places where spirituality, mission, and resources to those people we are visiting can be delivered. I engaged in conversations with consultants who are already undertaking similar work both in the Cal-Pac conference of the UMC and globally. My approach is narrative, based on work with these consultants and my own reflections on the pilot project itself. Further work will continue on completion of the pilot project to develop it further across the conference but will fall outside the scope of this paper.

Context

I am appointed clergy in the United Methodist Church serving as the Director of Justice and Compassion ministries for the Cal-Pac Conference. This work involves coordinating the special ministries of our conference comprising of such task forces as disability, immigration, homelessness and hunger, and disaster recovery. This gives me access to serve those people whom the church is called to serve and welcome and, at which, it so often falls short.

As a member of the queer community, I am in a unique position to serve those who are specifically excluded by the BoD from being full and active members of the community and

being able to be joined in matrimony by their pastor. In addition, as a female immigrant I understand some of the issues experienced by those trying to find equal footing within the organization (such as women, people of color, and immigrants).

Celtic Christianity is the indigenous religion of my native country and encompasses beliefs and practices to which I have always felt drawn. I will often use some of those practices and liturgy, as they speak to me of the people themselves and how they connect to the divine in ways that have fewer rules and regulations governing them.

Scope and Limitations

This project focuses on the [mainland] California portion of the Cal-Pac conference of the UMC (reserving the areas of Hawaii, Sai-pan and Guam for later implementation) and the types of communities contained therein. The overall structure is one which can be adapted and put into a more global format for the global church. The SHIFT truck will be visiting those places within that geographical area. Events for the truck will be scheduled to serve geographical clusters of churches and outside agencies providing mission work in a similar way to the proposed new structure for the church I hope to design as part of this project. The Annual Conference (AC) currently has a couple of small clusters of churches operating in this manner to a limited degree so would be great places to launch and test this ministry.

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Chapter Two - The United Methodist Church (UMC) and the LGBTQIA+ Community

The Episcopal greeting and introduction to the 2016 version of *The United Methodist BoD*, states that

The Discipline as the instrument for setting forth the laws, plan, polity, and process by which United Methodists govern themselves remains constant. Each General Conference amends, perfects, clarifies, and adds its own contribution to the Discipline. We do not see the Discipline as sacrosanct or infallible, but we do consider it a document suitable to our heritage and an expression of a future with hope. It is the most current statement of how United Methodists agree to live their lives together and “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” It reflects our understanding of the church and articulates the mission of The United Methodist Church: To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The Discipline defines what is expected of its laity and clergy as they seek to be effective witnesses in the world as a part of the whole body of Christ.²¹

In 1972, the GC of the UMC added the harmful language that “the practice of homosexuality” is “incompatible with Christian teaching,” (§161.G)²² into the BoD. This has resulted in years of controversy and disagreement within the global church as members hold opposing attitudes and viewpoints on the faith, moral, and ethical responses to this stance. There are three main viewpoints being expressed by members of the church which can be defined as “traditional” – uphold Biblical truth and the wording in the BoD; “liberal” – believe churches should be welcoming and non-judgmental of all and oppose the current language in the BoD; and “centrist” – take a middle of the road approach and posit that each individual church community should be able to make their own decisions on the subject of homosexuality, marriage, and

²¹ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline*, v.

²² Unless noted elsewhere, all citations denoted by paragraph (§) number are from *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016*.

ordination of clergy. Legislation in and around this original piece of language from 1972 has been a topic for discussion at every single GC since then (held every four years).

Before diving deeper into that, some background is required. The UMC was formed in 1968 through the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The BoD in its current format was created in the next quadrennium following this merger; although it has existed in some format since 1785, first by the Methodist Episcopal Church (established in 1784) and has always contained *The Articles of Religion*,²³ in part set out by Wesley himself and, due to the addition in 1808 of the restrictive rules (§17,104), has remained unchanged.²⁴

In addition to the incompatibility language already mentioned, there are additional places within the BoD which refer to human sexuality:

Marriage is defined as being between a “man and a woman,” and the BoD supports “laws in civil society that define marriage as a union of one man and one woman” (§161.C). Paragraph 161.G asserts that “sexual relations are affirmed only within the covenant of a monogamous, heterosexual marriage.” In contradiction to the incompatibility language cited earlier from this

²³ *The Articles of Religion* combine both the Confession of Faith (16 articles) from the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the *Articles of Religion* (25 articles) of the Methodist Episcopal Church, written and adapted by John Wesley from those of the Church of England.

²⁴ UMC, *The Book of Discipline*, §104. The articles of religion as detailed in the 2016 Book of Discipline: “17. Article I.—The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of Religion or establish any new standards or rules of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine. 18. Article II.—The General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Confession of Faith. 19. Article III.—The General Conference shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away with episcopacy or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency. 20. Article IV.—The General Conference shall not do away with the privileges of our clergy of right to trial by a committee and of an appeal; neither shall it do away with the privileges of our members of right to trial before the church, or by a committee, and of an appeal. 21. Article V.—The General Conference shall not revoke or change the General Rules of Our United Societies. 22. Article VI.—The General Conference shall not appropriate the net income of the publishing houses, the book concerns, or the Chartered Fund to any purpose other than for the benefit of retired or disabled preachers, their spouses, widows, or widowers, and children or other beneficiaries of the ministerial pension systems.”

section, this paragraph also goes on to ask, “families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends,” while also affirming that “all persons are of sacred worth, created in the image of God,” and that “God’s grace is available to all.”

The stories of the attempts to change the harmful language or at least make it less harmful are told throughout these snippets within the BoD. For example, the language “regardless of sexual orientation,” has been added to equal rights language which “supports efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against all persons” (§162.J, 1988)

A further anomaly to the exclusionary language states, “All people may attend its worship services, participate in its programs, receive the sacraments and become members in any local church.” (§214) At the same time, there are two paragraphs which prohibit the use of funds to any gay caucuses or groups which “promote the acceptance of homosexuality.” (§613.19 and §806.9, 1976).

The above-mentioned paragraphs apply to all persons, laity and clergy alike. The later section on ordination states “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve [in the United Methodist Church]” (§304.3, 1984) Further restrictions on clergy include a ban on same-gender weddings (§341.6, 1996) and inclusion in the list of chargeable offences of performing such weddings and ceremonies, “being celibate in singleness or not faithful in heterosexual marriage,” and for being “a self-avowed practicing homosexual.” (§2702.1)

At the GC of 2016, when there seemed to be no way to reach a solution and the atmosphere in the room was tense and fraught with emotion, the floor of the conference asked the bishops to lead us in a way forward. After forty-four years of disagreement, everyone was

deeply entrenched in their own viewpoints and little (if any) progress was being made toward coming to a solution. A special called GC was slated for 2019 where the only matter on the agenda would be the debate around homosexuality in an attempt to make this the last time such a matter would come before the GC. After a “pause for prayer” was requested by the bishops and granted to the floor of the GC, the executive committee of the Council of Bishops (CofB) gathered together and worked to create the vision, mission, and structure of a team which was known as the Commission On A Way Forward (Commission).

In order to ensure true representation of the membership of the global church,

Bishops nominated and selected 32 members to serve on the Commission, focusing on a diverse body that represents our global church. In the Commission there are persons from nine countries with a variety of theological perspectives. The Commission is one third laity, one third clergy, and one third bishops and includes younger persons, gay persons, professors, administrators, pastors, youth ministers, campus ministers, lay leaders, large church pastors, and persons identified with renewal and advocacy groups. There is Korean, Hispanic, African-American, Filipino, European, and African representation.²⁵

This diverse group of people met with each other, outside consultants, and other general agencies of the church, as well as holding interviews with stakeholders across the denomination. They met in churches and UMC buildings across the globe and ensured it was their faith which guided the work, reading and studying books and the Bible together, and spending time in prayer. The work was detailed and complex, and much time was spent on learning who the other members were and listening to their stories, as this was seen as a vital component if the work of the team was to be successful and meaningful to the global UMC community. The work they did

²⁵ UMC Committee, “Commission on a Way Forward,” Summary, 2019, [/web/20230121185829/https://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/council-of-bishops/news_and_statements/documents/Way_Forward_Report_-_Final_-_ENGLISH.pdf](https://web/20230121185829/https://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/council-of-bishops/news_and_statements/documents/Way_Forward_Report_-_Final_-_ENGLISH.pdf), 4.

was guided by the recommendations of the Executive Committee of the CofB who had defined the mission, vision, and scope of the work to be undertaken.

The mission was defined as a relational one, bringing together different voices and opinions from across the connection and inviting them to be in relationship with one another while discussing human sexuality in theological terms.²⁶ The vision of the commission was one which was to allow the diversity and many varied voices and opinions of the global UMC to be fully represented and included in the conversations and work.²⁷ The scope of the work was not to be limited by the current rules, regulations, or structure of the UMC but was authorized to work from scratch, being open to new and exciting ideas and opportunities for the global church.²⁸

²⁶ UMC Committee, “Commission on a Way Forward,” 6. “MISSION: The Commission will bring together persons deeply committed to the future(s) of The United Methodist Church, with an openness to developing new relationships with each other and exploring the potential future(s) of our denomination in light of General Conference and subsequent annual, jurisdictional and central conference actions. We have a profound hope and confidence in the Triune God, and yet we acknowledge that we do this work in a climate of skepticism and distrust, from a human point of view. We are a connection, and we admit that our communion is strained; yet much transformative mission across our world is the fruit of our collaboration. The matters of human sexuality and unity are the presenting issues for a deeper conversation that surfaces different ways of interpreting Scripture and theological tradition. The work is meant to inform deliberation across the whole church and to help the Council of Bishops in their service to the next General Conference in finding a way forward.”

²⁷ UMC Committee, “Commission on a Way Forward,” 6. “VISION: The Commission will design a way for being church that maximizes the presence of a United Methodist witness in as many places in the world as possible, that allows for as much contextual differentiation as possible, and that balances an approach to different theological understandings of human sexuality with a desire for as much unity as possible. This unity will not be grounded in our conceptions of human sexuality, but in our affirmation of the Triune God who calls us to be a grace-filled and holy people in the Wesleyan tradition.”

²⁸ UMC Committee, “Commission on a Way Forward,” 6. “SCOPE: We should be open to new ways of embodying unity that move us beyond where we are in the present impasse and cycle of action and reaction around ministry and human sexuality. Therefore, we should consider new ways of being in relationship across cultures and jurisdictions, in understandings of episcopacy, in contextual definitions of autonomy for annual conferences, and in the design and purpose of the apportionment. In reflection on the two matters of unity and human sexuality, we will fulfill our directive by considering “new forms and structures” of relationship and through the “complete examination and possible revision” of relevant paragraphs in the Book of Discipline. We will give consideration to greater freedom and flexibility to a future United Methodist Church that will redefine our present connectionality, which is showing signs of brokenness. If we ignore this work, fracturing will occur in more haphazard and even self-interested ways across the church. If we do this work only to address our preferences and self-interest, we will fail to place our complete trust in God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. If we do this work with complete surrender to God’s unlimited imagination and kingdom purposes, we will be blessed beyond our limited human imagination. God remains God; God is with us; God will never let us go. To God be the glory!”

In November of 2017, an initial report was presented to the CofB, and following feedback from this body, a further draft report was submitted in February 2018. The final draft was submitted in May 2018. Following this, the Judicial Council (Jud.C) released its decision (1360) that The Commission On The Way Forward's report and associated legislation should be presented directly to GC for consideration at the special called session in February 2019.²⁹

The special called session of GC took place in February 23-26, 2019, in St. Louis, Missouri, where the legislation developed by the Commission and based on their report offered a number of different options to be considered:

The One Church Plan

This plan allowed for each unit (AC, local churches, local missions) of the church from the AC down, including Bishops, to act according to their own convictions and beliefs with regard to human sexuality. It retained the current organizational structure of the global church while allowing each to practice according to their own views, without risking charges or conflict within their churches or conferences.

The plan took a more regional contextual approach, allowing for changes to the BoD according to the context in which they were taking place. It removed the harmful language from

²⁹ Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church, "Decision no. 1360," *Judicial Council Decisions Search*, May 25, 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230324033859/http%3A%2F%2Fee.umc.org%2Fdecisions%2F76720>. "The purpose of the special session of the General Conference 2019 stated in the Bishops' call is limited to receiving and acting upon a report from the Council of Bishops based on the recommendations of the Commission on a Way Forward. Petitions to the special session of the General Conference 2019 may be filed by any organization, clergy member and lay member of the United Methodist Church as long as the business proposed to be transacted in such petition is in harmony with the purpose stated in the call. It is the obligation of the General Conference to determine, in the first instance, through its committees, officers and presiders, acting in accordance with The Discipline and the rules and procedures of the General Conference, whether any such petition is 'in harmony.' However, business not in harmony with the purpose as stated in the call is not permitted unless the General Conference by a two-thirds vote shall determine that other business may be transacted."

the BoD and “added language that intentionally protects the religious freedom of pastors and churches who choose not to perform or host same-sex weddings and Boards of Ordained Ministry and bishops who choose not to credential or ordain self-avowed practicing homosexual persons.”³⁰

In addition, this plan asked for episcopal office reimbursement to be taken to a jurisdictional level.³¹ This addition had nothing to do with the work of the Commission and was, in my opinion, outside the scope of the committee and the work they were asked to undertake. While addressing new ways of being together and focusing still on our existing structures and operations, it is not directly in line with the debate on human sexuality and could and should have been addressed outside the special called GC.

Connectional Conference Plan

This plan split the global church up into different conferences according to their “values.” The USA would have three connectional conferences instead of its current five jurisdictional conferences (JC). The conferences would be progressive, traditional, and unity based. Central conferences (CC) would have the option of joining one of these three new conferences or creating their own (up to a maximum of five). All other current structures would continue to exist (GC and general agencies and boards, etc.) Each connectional conference would be

³⁰ UMC Committee, “Commission on a Way Forward,” 11.

³¹ The Commission on a Way Forward, “A Conversation with the Commission on a Way Forward: The One Church Plan,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20230314194655/https://mainstreamumc.com/documents/WayForwardReports/COWF-p11-25-OneChurchPlan.pdf>. “The One Church plan also asks the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) to find a means consistent with The Book of Discipline to assure that each jurisdictional conference or area supports the costs of its own episcopal leader and offices. All jurisdictional conference bishops will be paid the same salary, but the area where a bishop is assigned will, through a process developed by GCFA, provide the funding, similar to how episcopal housing allowances are now managed. This plan continues our historic Episcopacy Fund to help support central conference bishops, and provide for our ecumenical commitments. This does not affect central conferences. Central conference bishops and episcopal services will continue to be covered out of the current General Church Episcopal Fund.”

responsible for their own episcopal expenses and its own BoD. Jud.C would be formed using two people from each connectional conference. Each connectional conference would be required to submit a report each quadrennium to the Standing Committee on Connectional Conferences. Each Connectional Conference would be free to structure itself.

Traditionalist Plan

This plan was not originally included in the report from the Commission but was added at the last minute in response to a request following the final meeting of the Commission. The model was not as well researched, examined, or discussed as the other suggested models because of the lack of support it had received from both the Commission and the CofB.³² This was an important and pivotal point in the reception of the report and subsequent actions of GC 2019, as it altered the direction and outcomes in devastating ways for the global organization.

³² The Commission on a Way Forward, "A Conversation with the Commission on a Way Forward: The Traditionalist Plan," MainstreamUMC, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230314194608/https://mainstreamumc.com/documents/WayForwardReports/COWF-p55-57-TraditionalPlan.pdf>. "The request to include a full Traditionalist Model was received by the Commission on a Way Forward just prior to its last meeting, which began on May 14, 2018. Members of the Commission on a Way Forward registered concern that the time available did not allow for the full conciliar process utilized for the other two plans offered by the Commission on a Way Forward. The One Church Plan and the Connectional Conference Plan both received intensive and comprehensive participation from the Commission and the Council of Bishops over an extended period of time. While there was some support within both the Commission and the Council of Bishops for a Traditionalist Model, the support was modest enough in both groups to discontinue the Commission's earlier work on this model. In order to serve the May, 2018 request from the Council of Bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward resubmits the sketch sent to the Council of Bishops in November, 2017 as our work on the Traditionalist Model along with the history of this work and its implications for various bodies in The United Methodist Church. History of Traditionalist Plan:

- The Commission on a Way Forward developed a sketch of a Traditional Model that was submitted with the sketches of the One Church Model and the Multi-Branch plan in November, 2017
- It was reported to the Commission on a Way Forward that the Council of Bishops did not vote on or express any preference on the models but when asked which model(s) the Commission should develop, both the One-Church sketch and the Multi-Branch sketch were the focus.
- The One Church sketch and the Multi-Branch sketch were each developed into full plans by the Commission on a Way Forward for consideration by the Council of Bishops for their February, 2018 meeting. The Multi-Branch sketch later was titled the Connectional Conference Plan.
- At the April 29 - May 4, 2018 meeting of the Council of Bishops, the Commission on a Way Forward was asked to provide a Traditional Plan. The Commission on a Way Forward was asked to develop this plan by the end of its May 14-16 meeting."

The plan called for a strengthening of the language currently in the BoD such that it would:

- “Broaden the definition of self-avowed practicing homosexual to include persons living in a same-sex marriage or civil union or persons who publicly state that they are practicing homosexuals.
- Mandate that any just resolution shall include a commitment not to repeat the offense.
- Require every annual conference to certify that they will uphold, enforce, and maintain the Discipline's standards on LGBTQ marriage and ordination.”³³

ACs which did not comply with these requirements would no longer be permitted to use the UMC logo or receive funds from the UMC. Bishops would be required to uphold these new requirements on clergy, churches, and conferences, being removed from their positions within the global UMC if found guilty of not doing so.

Churches and clergy not in agreement and unwilling to comply with these changes would be encouraged to disaffiliate and become autonomous. All general boards and agencies, including the Jud.C, would remain unaffected by these changes.

The report concludes with appendices which address the ways in which churches may choose to remove themselves from the UMC following decisions which would be made at GC 2019, details on the scope of collaboration between the CofB and the Commission in the preparation of the report, contributions from Wespeth (on pensions), and details of the Traditional Plan prepared by a few members of the CofB and included for the benefit of

³³ Commission on a Way Forward, “Traditionalist Plan.”

delegates to GC 2019.³⁴ It is this part of the document which includes the legislative language and submissions for changes to the BoD as provided by the CofB and not the Commission.

GC 2019 met and voted on the recommendations as reported in the full Commission report as detailed above. The Traditional Plan, with some amendments, passed with a vote of 438 to 384. This was followed by a vote on requesting the Jud.C to rule on the constitutionality of the plan as amended which passed 405-395.

In October 2019 the Jud. C issued Decision No. 1377. Of the 17 pieces of legislation on the Traditional Plan and two on disaffiliation, nine were ruled as unconstitutional and one as partly unconstitutional. These nine petitions were concerned with areas such as episcopal accountability, boards of ordained ministry and their composition, examination of candidates for ministry, and disaffiliations for local churches. Much of this decision-making process was referred back to decision 1376, made in the Jud.C's meeting in April of that year. The decision stated that the legality of the petitions meant that not all entities were being given a full and fair access to the processes, noting particularly that "Clergy persons whose credentials and conference membership are at stake have the right to know what to expect when they choose a course of action or take a particular stance on ordination, marriage and human sexuality."³⁵

³⁴ Commission on a Way Forward, "Traditionalist Plan." "This model maintains the current stance of the church regarding the definition of marriage and the ministry of and with LGBTQ persons. It flows from the presupposition that The United Methodist Church ought to have one unified moral stance on the issues of marriage and sexuality. This model continues to affirm that LGBTQ persons are welcome to attend worship services, participate in church programs, receive the sacraments, upon baptism be admitted as baptized members, and upon taking vows of membership become members of local churches.

At the same time, the Traditional Model acknowledges the deep conscientious objections on the part of some to the current stance and practices of the church. It accommodates those objections by fostering a gracious and respectful way for those persons who cannot live within the current boundaries of church practice to form or join self-governing bodies that allow them the freedom to follow their conscience and institute practices in keeping with their understanding of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Such a self-governing body could constitute a Wesleyan denomination that could maintain an ongoing connection with The United Methodist Church through a Concordat Agreement (§574)."

³⁵ Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church, "Decision No. 1383," November 1, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230324040151/https://www.resourceumc.org/>-

Decision 1377 explained further the illegality of nine of the petitions due to the above conditions, as well as ruling the two petitions on disaffiliation as unconstitutional according to ¶41 of the BoD.³⁶ In addition both of these petitions also tried to omit the ratification of the AC, which is a requirement because, “If an annual conference is to play a vital role in planting new churches and ministries, it must also be given a role in the disaffiliation process of local churches within its boundaries.”³⁷

On January 3, 2020, a group of Bishops and other leaders within the church submitted a document named “Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation” (Protocol). This document would need to be approved by GC 2020 and offered a path forward for churches to

/media/c73a5a314593479ba66dc6a23a429fa4.ashx. “Impartiality and independence of decision-making bodies are the hallmarks of due process and bedrock principles of procedural justice in our constitutional polity. No process can be fair and equitable if the body bringing the complaint is also empowered to determine its merits. The fundamental right to fair and due process of an accused bishop is denied when the complainants are also among those tasked with reviewing and making the final decision. The Council of Bishops was not designed to function as an inquisitorial court responsible for enforcing doctrinal purity among its members.

As a tenet of United Methodist constitutionalism, the principle of legality means that all individuals and entities are equally bound by Church law, which shall be applied fairly and without regard to race, color, national origin, status, or economic condition. It forbids selective or partial enforcement of Church law at all levels of the connection and demands that The Discipline in its entirety be followed without distinction. All decisions and actions by official

bodies and their representatives must be based on and limited by the Constitution and The Discipline. Individuals must be informed with specificity and clarity as to what is prescribed and proscribed by Church law. No person or body can be required to act contrary to Church law or prohibited from engaging in lawful conduct. No person can be punished for actions and conduct that are permitted or required by Church law. Clergy persons whose credentials and conference membership are at stake have the right to know what to expect when they choose a course of action or take a particular stance on ordination, marriage, and human sexuality. To pass constitutional muster, any proposed legislation affecting clergy rights must define with sufficient clarity and specificity the standards to guide future actions of all concerned persons and entities.”

³⁶Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church, “Decision No. 1377,” February 26, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230324040537/https://www.resourceumc.org/-/media/92e70458e728428ca5e1dff21aa47520.ashx>. “In JCD 1366, the Judicial Council held that Traditional Plan Petitions 2, 3, and 4 denied a bishop’s right to fair and due process because ‘there is no separation of prosecutorial and adjudicative functions. Id. at 32. Particularly, the ‘same body that refers the complaint to the [Council Relations Committee] is also the final arbiter in administrative matters,’ id., and the members of the Administrative Review Committee ‘are still voting members of the [Council of Bishops], the body responsible for initiating and resolving complaints.’ Id. at 33. Although these amendments address the problem of comingling different functions, they fail to meet another constitutional requirement. ‘We note the conspicuous lack of any provision granting a bishop the right to appeal the findings of the COB. The finality of the COB’s decision is a clear violation of the constitutional guarantee of “a right to trial by a committee and an appeal.”’ JCD 1366 at 33. Absent language granting such an appeal right, amended Petitions 90033, 90034, and 90035 violate Constitution, ¶¶ 20 and 58.”

³⁷ Judicial Council, “Decision No. 1377.”

disaffiliate from the UMC and create a new denomination for those with traditionalist views, gifting them twenty-five million dollars as startup funds.³⁸ The team which created the proposal worked through a mediator and consisted of voices from across the spectrum of the global church.

The plan was another attempt at attaining a regional, contextual, global church which allowed flexibility in terms of acceptance of LGBTQIA+ matters. Understanding that the new traditional plan (passed at GC 2019) had gone into effect just days before, the *Protocol* included the following:

As one expression of reconciliation and grace through separation, the undersigned agree that all administrative or judicial processes addressing restrictions in the BoD related to self-avowed practicing homosexuals or same-sex weddings shall be held in abeyance beginning January 1, 2020, through the adjournment of the first conference of the post-separation United Methodist Church. Clergy shall continue to remain in good standing while such complaints are held in abeyance.³⁹

The Protocol also included the following:

- Additional two million dollars for the creation of further Wesleyan denominations.
- Thirty-nine million dollars for communities which have been marginalized by the church due to systemic racism.⁴⁰

³⁸ Bishops of the United Methodist Church et al., “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation,” January 3, 2020, [/web/20230121190310/https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/files/websites/www/pdfs/signed+umc+mediation+protocol+statement+-2020.pdf](https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/files/websites/www/pdfs/signed+umc+mediation+protocol+statement+-2020.pdf).

³⁹ Bishops, “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation,” 6.

⁴⁰ Bishops, “Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation,” 5. “As an acknowledgment of the historical role of the Methodist movement in systems of systematic racial violence, exploitation and discrimination, and as a fair and just step in addressing the impact of such harms, a sum of \$39M shall be allocated by the General Council on Finance and Administration in their budget recommendations over the next two quadrennia to support communities historically marginalized by the sin of racism. The goal of these earmarked funds shall be to strengthen ministries by and for Asian, Black, Hispanic-Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander Communities, encourage the full participation of historically marginalized communities in the governance and decision-making of the church, and ensure that the vital work of training the next generation of leaders by Africa University will be maintained. The Connectional Table in consultation with the National Plans, the Program Agencies of the Church, and the Council of Bishops shall be responsible for determining and evaluating programmatic priorities in relation to these earmarked funds. \$13M of this sum represents a contribution from the post-separation Traditional Methodist Denomination,

- Options for CCs, ACs, and local churches to disaffiliate and join one of the new expressions of methodism arising from the schism.

Following the acceptance and adoption of this Protocol, it was hoped that all would be ratified by GC 2020 and the schism details could be finalized. And then along came the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. GC 2020 was postponed until 2021, and then again until 2022.

Unfortunately, due to vaccine inequity, time differences across the conferences (which total 17 hours), and delays in visa processing because of a large back log, it was still not possible to hold a GC in 2022 and it has now again been postponed through 2024. This has left the global church in an interesting and challenging position.

The Wesley Covenant Association (WCA), who define themselves as follows:

Connects Spirit-filled, orthodox churches, clergy, and laity who hold to Wesleyan theology. It is an association of individuals and congregations who share a common understanding of our Wesleyan doctrine and a desire to become a vibrant, faithful, growing 21st century church.

The Wesleyan Covenant Association is a global connection of local churches, laity, clergy, and regional chapters that seeks to partner with like-minded orthodox Christians to build a new global Methodist church.⁴¹

The WCA were and are very active during this time. This is the organization which fully supported the passage of the Traditional Plan and are active and vocal against LGBTQIA+ people to the point of bringing charges against those who are ordained or allies conducting same sex marriages. Members of the WCA were at the table during the discussions around the

made possible by their decision to forgo receiving these funds and instead contribute them to this fund. This \$13M sum shall remain in the possession of and be administered by the post-separation United Methodist Church for this purpose. In addition, the post-separation United Methodist Church will contribute \$26M for a total of \$39M over 8 years for this purpose. Churches which align with the traditional Methodist denomination under this Protocol shall have the option to participate in programs and grants which serve their respective ethnic groups if they otherwise meet the requirements for such participation through this 8-year period.”

⁴¹ WCA, “Wesley Covenant Association,” Wesley Covenant Association, 2016, [/web/20230121184650/https://wesleyancovenant.org/](https://web/20230121184650/https://wesleyancovenant.org/).

Protocol and agreed to the propositions made in the final document, including the moratorium on charges against LGBTQIA+ clergy or those performing same sex marriages.

Due to the delay in being able to move forward with GC, the terms of the Protocol remained in place while at the same time proving to be a strain on the global church as they were only designed to be in place for a few months rather than over four years.

On May 1, 2022, the Global Methodist Church (GMC) was officially launched by the WCA and met on May 6 and 7, 2022, in Avon, Indiana, to officially launch this new denomination. At this conference they elected a new leader (replacing Keith Boyette who had been part of the committee which created the Protocol). They passed motions approving their policies and core beliefs for this new denomination. A new document was created entitled *The Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline*, which did not specifically name any restrictions against LGBTQIA+ people or their ability to serve and be joined in matrimony in their churches.⁴² In the section on Judicial Complaints, however, the document states that, “engaging in sexual activities outside the bonds of a loving and monogamous marriage between one man and one woman, including but not limited to sexual abuse or misconduct, the use or possession of pornography, or infidelity,” are chargeable offenses.⁴³

⁴² Global Methodist Church, “The Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline,” Global Methodist Church, May 2022, <https://globalmethodist.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Transitional-Discipline.20220912-Final.pdf>, 21. “7. We believe that human sexuality is a gift of God that is to be affirmed as it is exercised within the legal and spiritual covenant of a loving and monogamous marriage between one man and one woman (Exodus 20:14, Matthew 19:3-9, Ephesians 5:22-33). 8. We are saddened by all expressions of sexual behavior, including pornography, polygamy, and promiscuity, that do not recognize the sacred worth of each individual or that seek to exploit, abuse, objectify, or degrade others, or that represent less than God’s intentional design for His children. While affirming a scriptural view of sexuality and gender, we welcome all to experience the redemptive grace of Jesus and are committed to being a safe place of refuge, hospitality, and healing for any who may have experienced brokenness in their sexual lives (Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:24, 1 Corinthians 6:9-20).”

⁴³ Global Methodist Church, “The Transitional Book Of Doctrines And Discipline,” 88.

At this point some of the more conservative UMC churches had already left the UMC and joined the Free Methodist Church which practices a more traditional expression of Methodism. The GMC has not at the time of writing been recognized by GC as a denomination, which creates issues with the disaffiliation agreements as they specify that churches may only leave with the conditions in those agreements in order to join recognized denominations.

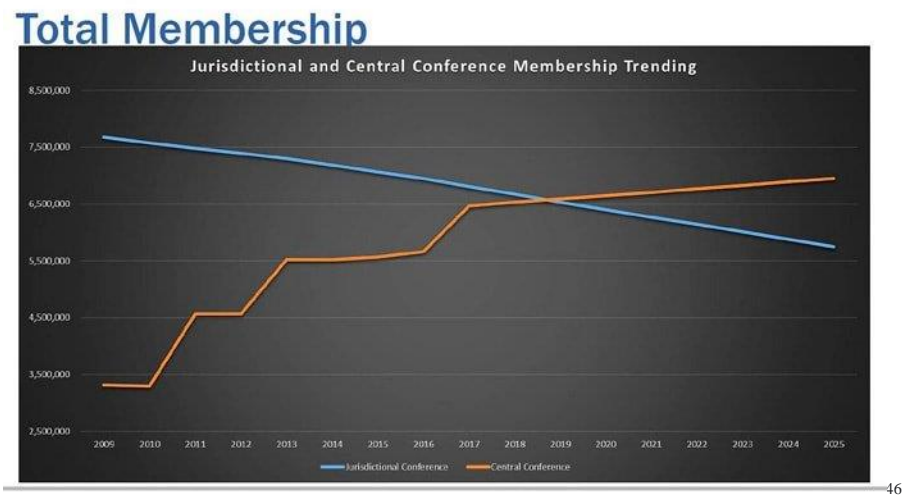
Up to this point the WCA had worked closely with the Africa Initiative, an empowering movement formed with and for the three CC s of Africa to assist with church revitalization and evangelism on that continent. Following the launch of the GMC and a number of churches leaving the UMC to join this new denomination, the bishops of the Africa Initiative issued a statement claiming that the initiative had lost sight of its original goals and was working with the WCA and GMC in destroying the UMC. This statement was released on September 8, 2022, following an annual meeting of the three CC s and was supported by seven of the 13 active, and one retired, Bishops for those CCs.⁴⁴

The membership of churches in Africa is growing steadily as opposed to the decline in churches across the USA. A report from the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) included the graph below, detailing church membership trends in 2019, comparing Jurisdictional (USA based) and CCs.

This has implications for the makeup of delegations at the next GC. The GCFA report went on to explain, “Of the 862 delegates in 2020, 55.9% will be from the U.S., 32% from Africa, 6% from the Philippines, 4.6% from Europe and the remainder from concordat churches

⁴⁴ Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church, “African Bishops Condemn Africa Initiative and WCA,” [UnitedMethodistBishops.org](https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org), September 8, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230324043533/https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/newsdetail/african-bishops-condemn-africa-initiative-and-wca-17013149>.

that have close ties to The United Methodist Church. Compared to the 2019 special session, the U.S. will have fewer delegates overall, while African delegations gain 18 and the Philippines two.”⁴⁵



This situation is likely to have swung further along its trend by the time GC 2020 will meet in 2024.

At the time of writing, the state of the UMC is in great flux. Local churches are leaving to join both the GMC and other approved denominations, some even becoming independent. In September of 2022, a group of the leaders who had been involved in and responsible for the creation of the Protocol released a statement detailing their reasons for no longer being able to support the agreement: “Given the growing opposition to the Protocol within the constituencies

⁴⁵ General Council on Finance and Administration, “US Membership Dips below UMC Majority,” um-insight, accessed September 14, 2022, /web/20230121190639/https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/finance-and-administration/u-s-membership-dips-below-umc-majority.

⁴⁶ GCFA, “US Membership Dips below UMC Majority.”

we represent, the dwindling support among General Conference delegates, and the serious reservations of Central Conference leaders, we can no longer in good faith support the Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace through Separation or work towards its adoption at the next General Conference.”⁴⁷ They did however, promise support for some of the provisions made in that Protocol, including finding paths to disaffiliation, continued work at ending systemic racism, and all forms of discrimination in the UMC, and continued abeyance on all charges and process with regard to any matters around LGBTQIA+ issues.

In response, the WCA made a statement of their own:

The WCA is calling on theologically conservative laity in local churches to lead their church councils to immediately begin withholding all apportionments and escrow them. We are making this call to laity in 19 annual conferences that are adding onerous and punitive requirements to disaffiliation provisions under paragraph 2553 of The BoD. This includes general, jurisdictional, annual conference, and district apportionments.⁴⁸

In addition to this, they stated that the moratorium on charges against LGBTQIA+ clergy or their allies who perform same sex marriages was now over, encouraging clergy and laity to bring charges not against clergy directly, but against the people who are supporting and approving them for ordination and appointment,

To be clear, the WCA has no interest in encouraging theological conservatives to go on a proverbial witch hunt to bring charges against LGBTQ+ clergy. We very much, however, encourage theological conservatives to hold bishops, district superintendents, conference officials, boards of ordained ministry, and other leaders accountable by no longer allowing violations to slide.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Various UMC Leaders, “A Statement About The Protocol Of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation,” um-insight, accessed September 20, 2022, /web/20230121190724/https://www.protocolresponse.com/, 2.

⁴⁸ Jay Therrell, “Let Our People Go,” Denominational, Wesley Covenant Association, 2016, /web/20230121190816/https://wesleyancovenant.org/2022/08/12/let-our-people-go/.

⁴⁹ Jay Therrell, “The Moratorium Is Over,” Denominational, Wesley Covenant Association, 2016, /web/20230121184839/https://wesleyancovenant.org/2022/08/18/the-moratorium-is-over/.

With matters changing on a daily basis, it is difficult to know where to stop for the purposes of this paper. The situation as detailed above is accurate as of October 2022. Details of plans for GC 2024 (originally 2020) are included in chapter 5 - Proposed New Structure.

Chapter 3 - UMC Structure

The UMC denomination is structured formally in line with the structure of a basic kind of federal government system. The concept of the UMC is touted as one of connectionalism, whereby local churches in any geographical area are connected with all other churches across the globe that are members of the denomination.

The organization is built upon the alliance of several sovereign bodies into a union. The basic premise is that the local smaller entities (ACs) retain their own sovereignty while the joined body of GC retains a system of checks and balances while concerning itself with matters common to the entire body of entities. There are general agencies which carry out this work, a CofB representing each of the ACs and a Jud.C whose members are elected from across the global denomination. Framing this in US Government terms, the GC is the legislature, the CofB and general agencies are the executive branch, and the Jud.C acts as the judiciary.⁵⁰

Neither the denomination, nor the GC, has any legal powers or rights but use as a rule book for the membership, the BoD.⁵¹

⁵⁰ General Council on Finance and Administration of the United Methodist Church, "Church Structure," *Legal Manual*, n.d., /web/20230121184907/https://www.gcfa.org/media/1271/section-1-church-structure.pdf.

⁵¹ GCFA, "The United Methodist Church," *Legal Manual*, I-2. "The United Methodist Church, as a denominational whole, does not have legal capacities and attributes.2 This concept can be misunderstood, misinterpreted, or misused in the secular legal world. The Discipline states:

Affirming the spiritual dimensions of the ministry of all Christians, as proclaimed in ¶¶ 120-143 of this Book of Discipline, it is recognized that this ministry exists in the secular world and that civil authorities may seek legal definition predicated on the nature of The United Methodist Church in seeking fulfillment of this ministry. Accordingly, it is appropriate that the meaning of "The United Methodist Church," "the general Church," "the entire Church," and "the Church" as used in the Book of Discipline should now be stated consistently with the traditional self-understanding of United Methodists as to the meaning of these words. These terms refer to the overall denomination and connectional relation and identity of its many local churches, the various conferences and their respective councils, boards, and agencies, and other Church units, which collectively constitute the religious system known as United Methodism. Under the Constitution and disciplinary procedures set forth in this Book of Discipline, "The United Methodist Church" as a denominational whole is not an entity, nor does it

The structure of the church is broken down from the GC into JCs, each of which consists of several ACs. In addition to JCs there are CCs which cover a geographical area outside of the United States. Local churches are members of ACs which are divided into Districts and Mission Areas. For the purpose of this paper, the Cal-Pac AC will be used as a reference model. There are five districts in this AC and each district is broken down into five or six mission areas.

Delegates to the meeting of the GC which happens every four years are elected by the ACs and are equally divided by clergy and laity. There are *Restrictive Rules* which dictate the scope of limitations over the power of the GC. These along with the *Articles of Religion*, *Confession of Faith*, and the *General Rules of the Societies* are found in the *Constitution* section (§104) of BoD and cannot be revoked, altered, or changed.

The Jud.C is responsible for interpretation of any changes to the BoD following GC. It is the responsibility of the CofB and the General Agencies to carry out and ensure implementation of the legislation across the global denomination.

There are five JCs in the USA which are created on a geographical basis. They were developed following the agreement in 1939 when the Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church unified. The work of the JCs consists of episcopal elections, provision of members to the general agencies, and providing hearings on appeals for clergy within that jurisdiction.

CCs are similar to JCs, but are located outside of the United States. There are currently seven CCs: Africa, Congo, West Africa, Philippines, Germany, Northern Europe and Eurasia,

possess legal capacities and attributes. It does not and cannot hold title to property, nor does it have any officer, agent, employee, office, or location. Conferences, councils, boards, agencies, local churches, and other units bearing the name "United Methodist" are, for the most part, legal entities capable of suing and being sued and possessed of legal capacities."

and Central and Southern Europe. These are structured a little more loosely than JCs and have more flexibility to adapt to the cultural environment in which they are located. They also have the authority for episcopal elections.

ACs are the main and most important component in the structure of the UMC. Each one is responsible for carrying out the work of the global church in its own geographical location. ACs have their own authority to vote on constitutional amendments, elect clergy and lay delegates to GC, JC, and/or CC, and election of clergy. They are overseen by a Bishop (elected in the JC of which they are a member), who also appoints clergy to churches or conference positions, decides legal questions, and guides the conference in matters of ministry and mission.

Commented [SR12]: Do ACs elect delegates to Central Conferences?

There are details on the duties and powers of the AC in the BoD ¶604. There are certain restrictions on what they can do and how they should be structured. They are required to structure their administration in line with the general agencies of the church but have some autonomy in how to do that within their context.⁵²

District Conferences (DC) are an optional requirement for the AC, and they can determine how they will be structured and what role they will take in the operation of their work. Each DC may have its own structure of committees which may or may not reflect the structure of

⁵² UMC, *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 610. “Annual conferences are permitted the flexibility to design conference and district structures in ways that best support the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ in an increasingly diverse global community and that place secondary any prescribed structure, except for the mandated entities in ¶610 above. In so doing, an annual conference shall provide for the functions and General Conference connections with all general agencies provided by the Discipline as follows: a) There shall be clear connections between the General Conference agencies, annual conference program and administrative entities, and the local congregation. These connections shall be identified in the business questions of the annual conference each year. b) There shall be clear checks and balances regarding program functions and financial/administration functions within the annual conference. These structural matters will be defined and approved by the annual conference session. Further, conferences are permitted to create contextually appropriate structures that encourage collaboration and partnerships among all program, administrative, and financial entities. Annual conferences may fund their ministries in ways that reflect conference priorities and structures, as approved by the annual conference in the budgeting process. All disciplinary references to ‘equivalent structures’ shall be defined by this paragraph.”

the AC or GC. A District Superintendent is appointed by the Bishop to be responsible for all the churches within that district and has authority to appoint both clergy and laity to the committees, as well as serving on the District Committee for Ordained Ministry (to help fulfill the AC responsibility for ordination of clergy).

The episcopal office of Bishop is elected at the JC with nominations coming from each of the ACs therein. JC delegates (elected through the AC) gather to vote on and elect the Bishops in line with the four year cycle of the GC. CC rules for Bishops vary according to the needs of that conference and as approved by GC. Bishops serve on the CofB and are responsible for serving the entire Church as well as their responsibilities to the AC to which they are appointed by the JC. They serve until the mandatory retirement age of 68 but remain members of the CofB after retirement.

The CofB must meet at least annually and have various roles and responsibilities as laid out by the BoD.⁵³ The efficacy of a Bishop is reviewed each quadrennium by the Committee on Episcopacy within each AC. Bishops are required to attend and lead GC but do not have a vote.

⁵³ UMC, *Book of Discipline*, ¶100-112. “May call a special session of the General Conference, 97 2. Shall set the time for the meeting of the jurisdictional conferences, 98 3. May assign a bishop to serve in a jurisdiction other than the one which elected the bishop, 99 4. May request the Judicial Council to determine the constitutionality of any act of the General Conference or of any action of any General, jurisdictional or central conference board or body, 100 5. Canvasses the votes of the members of the annual conferences as to ratification of constitutional amendments and announces that an amendment has been passed, Provides input regarding the purpose of churchwide offerings and other Special Sundays, 102 7. May specially assign a bishop to a churchwide responsibility, assuming there is approval from the bishop and the conference committee on episcopacy, 103 8. Fills vacancies in the office of bishop, 104 9. Handles matters relating to the resignation of bishops, 105 10. Approves bishops’ leaves of absence and sabbaticals (and selects the temporary replacements for those bishops), 106 11. May assign a bishop to visit another episcopal area or Methodist-related church, 107 12. May call a meeting of the Conference of Methodist Bishops, 108 13. Monitors the process of consultation in appointment-making, 109 14. Nominates or elects candidates for service to numerous boards, agencies, and commissions, 110 15. May assign a bishop to visit a central or provisional central conference or mission fields not included in such conferences, 111 16. Handles relationships with other ecclesial bodies, 112 and 17. Reviews membership applications of churches located outside the bounds of an existing annual, central or provisional conference.” (Numbers refer to BoD paragraphs.)

General Agencies are those agencies defined by GC and include the General Council on Finance and Administration, General Commission on Race and Religion, General Board on Global Ministries, and General Board of Church and Society.

The Jud.C has nine members who serve an eight-year term (staggered for consistency) and are nominated by the CofB to GC for voting. All decisions made by the JC are considered final and in addition to checking constitutionality of GC decisions they also determine appeals from Bishops on law, and “hear and determine the legality of any action taken by a General, Jurisdictional, Central Conference board or body.”⁵⁴

The Connectional Table (CT) discerns and articulates the vision for the global UMC and acts as a resource and steward according to the actions of the GC, working in consultation with the CofB. It is designed to enable communication and coordinate the life of the church in terms of missional and global needs, including fiscal matters. It is a collection of 49 voting members and 15 non-voting lay and clergy members from all JCs and CCs as well as representatives from the general agencies, caucuses, and young people. The leader is elected by the CofB.

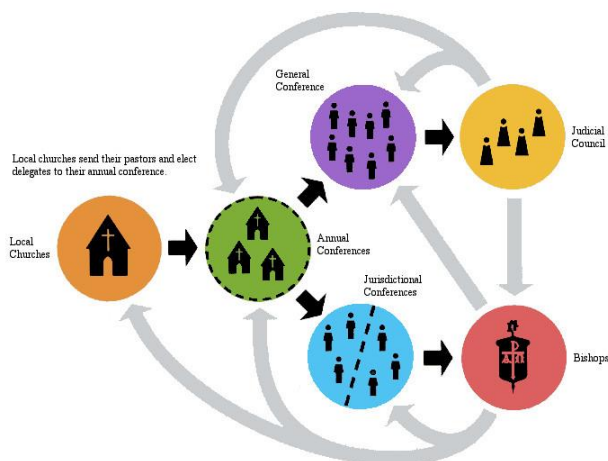
Charge Conferences are the smallest unit of organization within the UMC and are members of the local church. It meets at least annually and governs the business of the local church including clergy salary, candidates called to ministry, and the ministry of that church.

The structure of the church as described above can be summarized as follows:

⁵⁴ UMC, *The Book of Discipline*, ¶56.2.

UMC Structure			
	Legislative	Executive	Judicial
Global Church	General Conference	Council of Bishops	Constitution
Jurisdiction and Central Conferences	Jurisdiction and Central Conferences	Council of Bishops	Bishops
Annual Conference	Annual Conference	Resident Bishop	Clergy
District Conference	District conference	District Superintendent	Laity
Local Church	Charge Conference	Clergy	None

The United Methodist Committee on Communications graphic showing the connections between the various entities⁵⁵:



⁵⁵ Itinerant Church, "UMCOM Connectional Chart," <http://itinerantchurch.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/UMCOM-connectional-chart.jpg>.

Church Council and Governance Boards are defined as:

The church council shall provide for planning and implementing a program of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources in the local church. It shall also provide for the administration of its organization and temporal life. It shall envision, plan, implement, and annually evaluate the mission and ministry of the church. The church council shall be amenable to and function as the administrative agency of the charge conference (§ 244).⁵⁶

The council meets at least quarterly and is comprised of members of the local church which include the lay leader, staff-parish relations, finance, trustees, United Methodist Men and Women, young adults, youth, and any clergy appointed to that charge.

In addition to the Church Council, there are a number of sub-committees which are required for each individual church. Membership of these committees is generally provided by those church attendees who are professing members of the charge conference, but there are a few positions which do not require this commitment. These include but are not limited to:

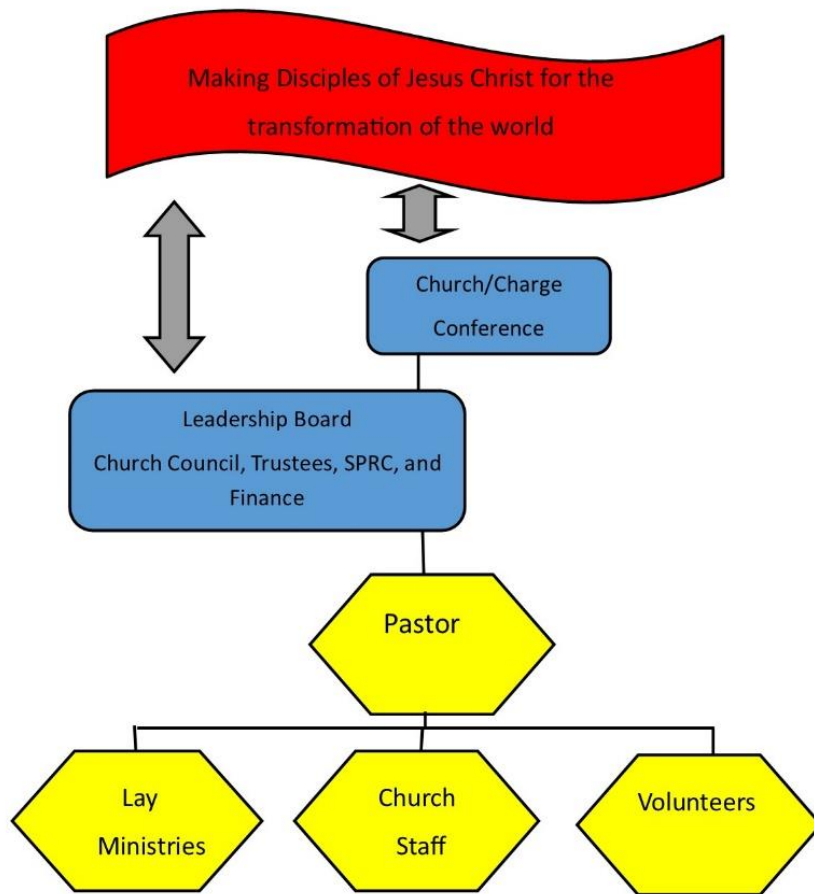
Nominations and leadership development – professing members only whose charge is to “identify, develop, deploy, evaluate, and monitor Christian spiritual leadership for the local congregation.”⁵⁷ Staff (Pastor) Parish relations – professing or associate members who “shall reflect biblically and theologically on the role and work of the pastor(s) and staff as they carry out their leadership responsibilities.”⁵⁸

Local church structure (charge conference) – Graphic used by a large number of local churches to explain the structure of their charge and the laity and volunteer roles and responsibilities in the management of the entire local church entity:

⁵⁶ UMC, *The Book of Discipline*, ¶252.1.

⁵⁷ UMC, *The Book of Discipline*, ¶258.1

⁵⁸ UMC, *The Book of Discipline*, ¶258.2



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Financial Systems

The UMC uses a system of apportioned giving which means that for every dollar which is donated to the local church, there is a breakdown of what different areas it is used to fund. The local church gathers money through tithes, donations, and fund-raising activities. The local church is then required to give a certain amount of that money to the AC. The amount of this is calculated according to membership and church size. Some of this money is used to support the work of the AC and the services and resources, which they, in return, then offer to support the local churches. The AC then pays apportionments to the GC where the money goes towards supporting the general agencies and the global church.

The idea of organizing the finances in this manner is to be able to pool resources from a large number of small sources which, when used together, can be used more effectively and spread throughout the rest and for the benefit of the whole church.

One of the main problems with this system is that church membership is declining and using this as a measuring tool provides inaccurate results when calculating apportionment amounts. The reports produced by the local churches which are used to calculate apportionment amounts are often inaccurate and badly completed, producing unfair results for the remaining churches in the AC who are required to cover the difference (so apportionment percentages are raised.)

Systemic problems

The general organizational structure of the Global UMC is complex and top heavy as can be seen from the above description and diagrams. Several churches have worked at streamlining the structure which helps to some extent, with less committee members being required and also

cuts down significantly on meeting times and communication errors. As churches become smaller and smaller, even this structure becomes difficult for many to reliably staff with volunteers.

Just as colonialism has created hierarchical structures of humanity, which in the past were white and non-white, so today is the church built on this same structure. Colonialists believed that whites were closer to nature (and creation) so therefore were more human than those who were not white. This binary between human and nature is the problem which has underlined so many of the outcomes of colonialism and its associated capitalism. This structure works inside locales within colonies and has been perpetuated throughout them, resulting in those who have paler skin being more adjacent to whites. This gives them the opportunity to be more affluent and then they too often become oppressors themselves, as they are afraid to lose the position they have gained and so become complicit with whiteness – even though they are not treated totally equally.

Once an organization is structured in such a way to maintain its status quo, it must depend on the very people which it excludes or marginalizes, then this exclusion and marginalization becomes normalized. This results in making it easy to target other groups who pose a threat to the power structure of the organization or, alternatively, can be used as a tool to manipulate who holds and wields the power.

If we are truly to follow the teachings of Jesus, namely to love our neighbors, then surely the goal of Christianity and Christian-based organizations must be to open spaces such that versions of Christianity can thrive together. In order to do this, we must build a paradigm which is supportive for all lives and for the expression of love and inclusion and without making a supremacist claim over one another.

An important aspect of the success of colonialization is that of the “terrifying object,” which is a view of a certain group of marginalized or oppressed people perpetuated by those in power and is conjured by their desires for domination and supremacy. This production of the terrifying object must be a continued and concerted process in order to be successful. The picture of the targeted terrifying object is planted deep into the psyche of the society or group by the dominant power. By doing this, they are creating the paradigm which will then rule the oppression which they are defining. For example, when looking at the socialization of black American male subjects who were painted as ones who are prone to commit crime, and are depicted as violent and angry, and have an illogical desire to always take action which endangers others, and the female black subject being painted as lustful and hyper-sexual (in addition to angry) so that when their bodies are invaded by white supremacy and robbed of agency by white actors then it is not morally wrong because of their “nature” (which is non-white and therefore further removed in the created order). This then allows the community to not be disturbed by attacks on their bodies or by the fact that these attacks are not counted as criminal. For this model to be successful then it must be continually invented and taught.

In a similar way, LGTBQIA+ people have become the “terrifying object” for the church, and as time has gone on, allies and supporters of equal rights have been painted as “bleeding heart liberals” or “snowflakes,” whose opinion is not worthy of consideration or value in any issue. By using the power of separation, the dehumanization of LGTBQIA+ people has been perpetuated throughout religious organizations and the creation of the “them” and “us” scenario has been successfully achieved.

While this exclusionary behavior is directed overtly towards members of the LGTBQIA+ community, there is much which happens to minoritize (or marginalize or disenfranchise) other

communities within the UMC. In the context of the Cal-Pac conference, cross-cultural appointments, lack of understanding of the culture of the context into which appointments are made (by the cabinet and the pastor appointed there), inequity of wages across gender, and perceptions of which churches are the “good” appointments and which ones are the “bad,” in terms of perceived clergy ability or value placed on context, are all ways which divide, separate, and create additional communities of “them and us” within the AC. The effects of this ripple down to laity and the local communities in myriad ways which create distrust among non-members of the UMC.

A solution for structuring the leadership of the organization must be developed which addresses the needs of the people who are engaging with the church today and particularly geared to the cultural context in which that church is placed. Freedom to create expressions of church both inside and outside of the building is a necessity if the church is going to have a continued presence in many of these places.

Creativity, imagination, and courage to try out new things are all stifled in places where bureaucracy demands multiple approvals from entities further “up” in the structure of an organization, which have little or no connection with the work being done and required or needed to be undertaken in any given area.

Chapter 4 - Celtic Christianity – Development And Structure

The Celtic Church existed from the fifth to the twelfth centuries and was orthodox in its faith expression, while at the same time maintaining unity through relationships. The church was inextricably linked to creation and creation care, understanding that we are at “one” with nature, fully part of it and in it rather than being simply stewards of the world and all it contains. Communities were based around geographical areas (primarily because long distance transportation was not an option for most people).

As the Roman Empire began to send its missions of evangelism to the British Isles, so the faith became more and more regulated by the empire, with the status of clergy being elevated to that of dignitary rather than member, moving away from nature and service to the poor, and less biblically based, instead concentrating on hierarchical structure and uniformity.

The Celtic Church grew predominantly through the hermits who created space for themselves in forests and woodlands. Gradually people would come and join them, increasing the population, building more huts close by, until there was enough of them that a chapel was required. These communities varied in size from small (ten to 20 people) to the very large (hundreds and even thousands) and were responsible for creating the largest settlements in the British Isles. Eventually this chapel would become the monastery for the settlement. When a community became too large for the liking of some, they would head out to a new place, set themselves up as hermits and then the cycle would repeat itself.

The main difference between these monasteries and those of mainland Europe was the freedom allowed to the nuns and monks, who set their own rhythms of spiritual life and

community care. Rather than a ruler, the abbot was a spiritual guide, there to offer advice and guidance spiritually, mentally, and emotionally. Every monastery included huts where the sick and poor could be cared for, and the monastery's nuns and monks were expected to share a portion of the food they had gathered with those in their care in these huts.

At times these monasteries were part of the homesteads in a settlement and the spiritual leader would emerge from the group of families and clans which made up the settlement. Hospitality and welcome of the stranger were a vital part of the rhythm of life and extended not just to human visitors but all the created order.

A brief timeline of the conversion of the indigenous Celts of the British Isles to Christianity shows it was a slow and difficult process:

- B.C. The Celts emerged as a distinct race in Europe.
- 55 B.C. Unsuccessful attempt by Caesar to invade Britain which resulted in a withdrawal.
- 54 B.C. Successful invasion of Britain, but again resulting in a withdrawal.
- 40-50 A.D. Conversion of the Celts of Galatia by Paul.
- 43 A.D. Roman invasion of the Southwest area of Britain.
- 63 A.D. Joseph of Arimathea is reported to have visited Britain in order to convert its inhabitants.
- 75-77 A.D. Roman conquest completed.
- 312 A.D. Christianity is declared the official religion of Britain and the Roman Empire by Constantine.
- 410 A.D. Last Romans leave the British Isles. Anglo Saxons invade Britain and destroy many of the churches.
- 431 A.D. Christianity is starting to be accepted throughout Ireland.
- 450 A.D. Wales and Cornwall are planted with many different missions.
- 560 A.D. Mission communities created in Scotland.
- 596 A.D. Gregorian Mission. Christianity becomes the predominant religion in Ireland.

- 664 A.D. Synod of Whitby⁵⁹ tackles the differences between Roman and Celtic practices and enforces Roman regulations.
- 1100 A.D. Christian Church becomes dominant over all Celtic Religions.

Prior to the arrival of Christianity, the Celtic faith was regional and tribal. Tribes were connected with each other through faith, geography, and simple trading. Some worshipped many gods and some only one. All were deeply connected to the land and nature. There was a special reverence for the number three, which can be seen in the triskele, a Celtic symbol depicting a three-pronged whirl. It was believed that the center of this triskele held strong powers capable of regeneration. This played an important factor in the conversion to the triune nature of God offered by Christianity. They also believed that death was not to be feared, as it was merely a transition to a different place.

The Romans brought Christianity to the Celts in the third century A.D. and were assisted and developed further by the mission of Saint Patrick, which also helped it spread further into Ireland. The amalgamation of the two faith practices took some time, with a merging of Celtic and Christian symbols and practices which made the transition for the Celts an easier and more intuitive practice. Many of the Druid leaders of the Celts were among the first to be converted and helped lead their communities into the new practices and language of the Christian faith.

⁵⁹ Orthodox Wiki, "Synod of Whitby," accessed March 24, 2023, [/web/20230121191053/https://orthodoxwiki.org/Synod_of_Whitby](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Synod_of_Whitby). "The Synod of Whitby was an important local synod which led to the liturgical and administrative unification of the Church in England. Summoned by King Oswiu of Northumbria in 663 A.D., the synod was held in 664 at Whitby Abbey, which was St. Hilda's double monastery of Streonshalh, at Whitby. The Synod of Whitby constituted a milestone in the history of the Church in Britain, since delegates from the North and the South came together to debate the future of the church in Northumbria. The actual matters in dispute were fairly minor, the main controversies being over how to calculate the date of Pascha, and what style of tonsure clerics should wear. However, whichever side was acknowledged as having authority to rule on these matters would also decide whether the Celtic or the Roman customs would have ascendancy over the whole North of England. The matter came to a head one spring when the king, who followed the Celtic practice, was feasting at Pascha, while the queen, who followed Roman practice, was still fasting for Lent. Final judgement went to the Roman church, whose practices were then adopted by the Northumbrians. Supporters of the Celtic traditions withdrew to Scotland."

This conversion is not explored deeply in the context of this paper, which instead concentrates on the organization of these new faith communities and how they functioned.

In her book *A World Made Whole*, Esther de Waal describes the new merged communities as being places where “Christ is celebrated, the center of the universe, the keystone in the structure which God designed. It is as though the entire universe is simply one whole in which past and present, heaven and earth, are embraced. There is no division into two realms, the natural and the supernatural, but the two flow together into one.”⁶⁰

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The basic belief system with which they guided themselves was still deeply grounded in nature and creation as something which was loved and something to be enjoyed, just as God did when creating it. Christ was seen as the vehicle for restoring a communion with the created world and also that creation had not yet been realized into fullness.⁶¹

The churches that developed shared the ups and downs of the life of the community in which they were located. They held three main tenets or principles of their faith: human solidarity, hospitality, and the renunciation of power.

The monasteries which formed the heart of the community continued to be led by lay people raised up from within their communities. Bishops were under the authorities of these abbots and their responsibilities were over religious matters, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, etc. rather than in the leadership of the community which fell solely under the auspices of the abbot and their assistants (which, while being predominantly male, did also include female leaders). Pastoral care was undertaken by many of those at the monastery and love and care of neighbor was considered a requirement for all residents of the community. The social aspect of

⁶⁰ Esther De Waal, *A World Made Whole: The Rediscovery of the Celtic Tradition* (Fount, NY: 1991), 78.

⁶¹ Simpson, *Celtic Christianity*, 320.

life in the community was one which guided all the work of the monastery and its leaders. As it developed along the social and cultural ways of the community in which it was located, the church was able to adapt and change according to where it was and the people it was serving.

Communities were divided into fellowships which had up to seven churches within them. A single monastery would be attached to one or more fellowships and would help coordinate the work of these circles within individual fellowships and among and between all the fellowships. Leadership of churches and fellowships did not require all to be ordained. Once the natural leaders had emerged from a community, they were encouraged to continue their work either through the clergy route or as laity depending on where their call was taking them.

James Mackay, in his book *Introduction to Celtic Spirituality*, describes this process through the work of St. Patrick, explaining that he “encourages his converts to embrace the religious life as monks and nuns, or even as people simply vowed to continence...It seems entirely likely that these religious did not form separate communities, enclosed and living on their own, but led ascetic lives in their households. One of these gifts has been to help ordinary people form a language that speaks of vocation in simple terms.”⁶²

Sketes developed, which were collections of small cells developed around a place of worship and which provided opportunities for prayer, worship, hospitality, and teaching, similar to a retreat center in modern day. These places were often used by groups on missions, which included children in their work.

A great influence on their faith and the way they lived their lives came from Pelagius. A monk himself trained in the Irish monastic ways and very much influenced by the Desert Fathers,

⁶² James P. Mackey, ed., *An Introduction to Celtic Christianity* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1989), 238.

he believed that perfection was achievable on earth (going even further than Wesley himself would later in his own search for defining and finding perfectionism) and that the life of a Christian should always be working towards that goal. Pelagius viewed the Roman church as corrupt and dishonest, not enforcing the rules and laws of the faith it espoused. He believed that through good behavior and conducting oneself in the appropriate manner while following a life of faith, it was possible to live a life without sin. The monks and priests were to model this life to all in the community and teach them in these ways through spiritual practices of prayer, fasting, calmness, and humility.

For them the kingdom of God through Christ offered a world which was cloaked in peace, protected, and just; most of which was not a true reflection of the world they inhabited which was often cruel, harsh, barbaric, and unfair. God had a significant and tangible presence in their lives as Macquarrie notes in his book *Paths in Spirituality*: “The Celt was very much a God-intoxicated man whose life was embraced on all sides by the divine Being. But this presence was always mediated through some finite this-world reality, so that it will be difficult to imagine a spiritually more down-to-earth than this one.”⁶³

The Celts particularly melded their pagan spirituality with the Christian spirituality through creation and connection with the natural world. God was present with them and in them and a part of the very world in which they lived. They considered themselves part of this creation and active members of it, working with God to nurture and care for it in reciprocal relationship.

Each person was linked with a ‘soul friend’ who walked their spiritual journey with them through prayer, praise, and even acts of penitence. This practice was derived from the Desert

⁶³ John Macquarrie, *Paths in Spirituality*, 2nd ed. (Norwich, UK: Hymns Ancient & Modern, Ltd., 2012), 123.

Fathers and Mothers, who often had a cell mate (literally or figuratively). Soul friends acted like mentors and were deeply involved in all aspects of the lives of their mentee and was extended to children who were assigned someone from the point of their baptism or confirmation to read and study scripture with them.

While penitence was considered a requirement for transgressions (and generally a very private part of the relationship with God), the aim was to reconnect with and remember their relationship with God rather than one of punishment, and to remind them of their own forgiveness and their call to forgive others; again, focusing on the relationship aspects of their lives.

Worship and praise were always corporate, linking themselves together with those who have gone before and with the kingdom of heaven. “Praise linked the worshipping community on earth with the hosts of heaven, envisaged in being engaged in continual praise of God, and indeed the whole created order.”⁶⁴

As well as prayer and praise, much of their focus was on practical action. Saints were described according to their charitable works such as feeding the poor and caring for the sick. In the *Alphabet of Devotion* (a monastic text composed by Colmán mac Beógnai as a suite of short poems designed to teach and reinforce the primary values), the very first verse (“Faith with works”) makes it clear the faith was enacted through works.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ian C Bradley, *Following the Celtic Way: A New Assessment of Celtic Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2020), 104.

⁶⁵ John Carey, *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Writings* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 231. “Faith with works, desire with constancy, calmness with devotion, chastity with humility, fasting with moderation, poverty with generosity, silence with conversation, distribution with equality, endurance without grievance, abstinence with exposure, zeal without severity, gentleness with justice, confidence without carelessness, fear without despair, poverty without pride, confession without excuse, teaching with fulfilling, climbing without falling, lowliness towards the lofty, smoothness towards the rough, work without grumbling, guilelessness with wisdom, humility without partiality, the Christian life without hypocrisy – all these are contained in holiness.”

Commented [SR15]: I made a guess at the source based on an internet search. Since this is a translation, it needs a full footnote for the translated source.

Pastoral care was a vital component of ministry and carried out as the sole function of certain monks or laity within the community. A focus was put on listening and healing through conversation and prayer with a lack of judgment and a desire to walk alongside those they were working with. Peace making work and living in peaceful union within their communities played an important role in the way they lived their faith. Within a world that was violent and brutal, the sanctuary and peaceful way of living offered by the community was welcomed by many.

Evangelism and itinerancy were often the call of monks and priests. They would travel far from their homes and live very restricted lives in terms of comfort, placing great import on spreading the word of the salvific acts of Christ for and on behalf of all humanity. This was based very much on the biblical example of Abraham who was called to leave his home and journey to strange lands. Many of the priests who travelled would perform baptisms, burials, and deliver sermons among the peoples they met along the way, often creating new monasteries and Christian circles in those places. Important to all those who travelled and those who remained serving in their home location was the sense of an inner faith journey which was a vital component of the lives of all Christians. Prayer, meditation, practice, and service to others were all considered ways to travel on this inner journey and reach higher levels of faith and understanding.

Justice was an important component of life in a Celtic Christian setting, leading and informing the community on the best ways they could live together in harmony and with equity for all. Marjorie Bennet in the collection of essays titled *Persistent Resistance*, explains that the Celtic word for justice was *kouero*, which meant “in accordance with the truth.” For them the concept of truth was far more than a lack of lies or mistruths or even personal integrity but rather “a cosmic indisputable rightness that human behavior must seek to imitate. It meant living out in

practice... the green and breathing relationship between Heaven and earth and between community members.”⁶⁶

Rather than having a justice system based around retribution as we do in the USA today (in practice if not in written law), their justice was much more restorative, seeking to restore the balance of harmony within the community and the relationships therein.

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This structure in which they lived out their lives and their faith was to them both outwardly focused and deeply rooted in their community. The people who were their neighbors were the ones whom they cared for, prayed, and worshipped with. Laity and clergy (in the form of monks) took care of the community together in the circles, which formed the basis of their community, were a vital part of how it all functioned. Compassion for each other and for the poor as practiced in these communities resulted in societal changes in conditions and laws. A less barbaric and more peace filled society flourished through actions of prayer, repentance, faith through works, and praise. Women became protected from having to go into war and resolutions were always sought in terms of peace rather than further conflict.

A circle would consist of a monastery, some chapels or meeting houses, a place to care for the sick, a place for communal meals, and all deeply connected with caring for nature and each other both where they were and outward in the world to which they traveled on pilgrimage and to evangelize. In the same way that the disciples of Jesus were pulled from the communities in which he worked, so were the people of England and Ireland those who became leaders in the Celtic Christian Communities. As Lucy Menzies describes in *Columba*, “the church was simply

⁶⁶ Ellyn Sanna, *Persistent Resistance: Calls for Justice from the Celtic Traditions: A Collection of Essays* (Vestal, NY: Anamchara Books, 2019), 44.

a series of Christian communities bound together on the family principle which formed the characteristic feature of the Celtic national life.”⁶⁷

Leadership was an area which also mixed laity and ordained clergy in terms of their roles and responsibilities in great contrast to the way institutional religion is organized today. Ordination did not necessarily mean a path to leadership within the community. It was more viewed as a call to ministry rather than one to leadership. Laity and clergy shared the responsibilities of community organization and coordination. Again, it was through relationship that they defined themselves; relationship with God, Christ, and the Spirit, relationship with peers, and relationship with those who have gone before.

The Celtic Church and the LGBTQIA+ Debate

It is beyond the scope of this paper to dig deeply into the translations of the Bible and the “clobber passages”⁶⁸ which have been used as a reason to exclude the queer community from full participation in Christian churches and other religious organizations. There is not a great amount of data available with which to explore this subject in the context of the Celtic community either before or after the merging of the pagan and Christian faiths as has been discussed here.

David Cole, founder of Waymark Ministries and the United Kingdom Deputy Guardian for The Community of Aidan and Hilda points out in his article “LGBTQ And The Ancient Celtic Church,” that despite this lack of research we can look at the versions and translations of

⁶⁷ Lucy Menzies, *Saint Columba of Iona* (London, UK: Penguin Random House, 1989), 189.

⁶⁸ The clobber passages are the following six passages in Scripture which have been used to posit that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching”:

Genesis 19:4–25

Leviticus 18:22

Leviticus 20:13

Romans 1:26–27

1 Corinthians 6:9–11

1 Timothy 1:9–10

the Bible which would have been used by these communities and from these glean certain details which should help us understand where the Celtic Church stood theologically at that time.⁶⁹

At the heart of any debate on biblical translations with the LGBTQ community is the Greek word “arsenokoites.” In modern translations of the Bible this word has been used to mean homosexual. However, in the work done by Kathy Baldock in *Walking the Bridgeless Canyon* we learn that this translation had only happened since 1946. In her research on this subject, Kathy discovered the archives of the notes from the committee which gathered to create the RSV translation of the Bible. In these notes she discovered that Paul had created two lists of sins. These lists were divided into two classes, sins against people and sins which were abuses of power (in both business, trade, or personal terms). The word arsenokoites appeared on the list of power abuses rather than the list for sins against people, indicating that what Paul was speaking of was relationships where the balance of power was not even (for example priests with altar boys).⁷⁰

There has been some discussion amongst researchers and theologians as to the validity of such an organization as the Celtic Church. The argument against is that each circle of community was located in a different geographical location and did not necessarily have ties with any of their neighbors or extended communities. There was, however, a commonality across these individual circles through which there were shared characteristics marking them out as part of this unique structure and organization. These similarities include, community members being part of a universal church, common doctrines, the same Bible, and the same sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion), shared laity and ordained leadership, circular communities, level

⁶⁹ David Cole, “LGBTQ and the Ancient Celtic Church,” The Community of Aidan and Hilda, <https://newedenministry.com/2020/04/02/what-was-the-ancient-celtic-christian-view-of-homosexuality/>.

⁷⁰ Baldock, *Walking the Bridgeless Canyon*.

structure of leadership (rather than hierarchical), shared sense of being part of the order of creation and nature, triune nature of God, spiritual practices and spirituality. Simpson summarizes it this way: “Because no hand of bureaucracy was being imposed, structures altered to suit changing needs, and bishops fitted in to a monastic system with its own natural leaders. Yet through all the change, unity, and continuity was maintained.”⁷¹

Cole in his article points out that the translation used in the Reformation affirms this notion of power relationships as “it translates *arsenokoites* as ‘Knabenschänder’, from ‘Knaben’, meaning boys or young children, which suggests that for Luther during the church Reformation *arsenokoites* was interpreted as something more closely associated with pedophilia than what we understand as ‘homosexuality’ in today’s LGBT+ conversation.”⁷²

Neither of these translations mentioned here would have been used by the Celtic church as it formed and developed as they did not exist. The Celts would have used a Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate. According to Cole, and others, including David Wright in his journal article “Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ἀρσενικοῦται (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10),” the Latin would have read *masculorum concubitoribus* which indicates prostitution or “male sexual agents.”⁷³ This again refers to a relationship where there is an imbalance of power, a dominant and subservient male, reflecting the culture of the times in which it was written.

Cole goes on to quote Pelagius and his commentary on the book of Romans which was written in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the same time that the Latin translation was being written and making it possible that Pelagius was working with the original Greek.

⁷¹ Simpson, *Celtic Christianity*, 254.

⁷² Cole, “LGBTQ and the Ancient Celtic Church.”

⁷³ David F. Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ἀρσενικοῦται (1 Cor. 6:9, 1 Tim. 1:10),” *Vivulae Christianae* 38, no. 2 (1984): 1.

The commentary for Romans 1:26-27 goes like this, with scripture in italics and the words of Pelagius in non-italics:

*26... for their women changed their natural relations into relations which are against nature. Those who turned against God turned everything on its head: for those who forsook the author of nature also could not keep to the order of nature... 27 in the same way, men too, having forsaken natural relations with women, were inflamed with lust for one another, men committing shameful acts with men. Lust, once unbridled, knows no limit. And receiving in themselves the due penalty for their errors. So ran the order of nature, that those who had forgotten God did not understand themselves as well.*⁷⁴

Pelagius was more concerned with humanity's link to nature and creation and what happens when humanity loses that link and how it affects their behavior and decision-making processes. With so little commentary or indications of sermons, messages, or shared teaching available, it seems likely that homosexuality was not a subject area which caused concern or was problematic to the Celtic community.

Simple Organizational Structure

The simplest way to describe the structure of the Celtic community is in terms of cells and hubs. Cells were often known as houses of prayer and were individual houses where life was dedicated to daily prayer. Hubs best describe the models which formed the village or community around the church. Hubs contained houses of prayer and larger churches that became the center of the community, offering meals, education, health care, pastoral care, library, and even arts centers. The hub would also contain farms and workshops, places of industry which the community would work at together for the common food.

Each of these hubs which developed were individual, worshipping and living according to their own rules and flow of life (including prayer and worship) and yet connected with each other through their faith, mission work, and itinerant clergy and laity.

⁷⁴ Cole, "LGBTQ and the Ancient Celtic Church," 3.

These terms are used in the following chapter where a new vision for the way the UMC could structure post-schism and post-pandemic into a vibrant and relevant church which serves the local community where it is located in partnership with other churches and agencies in that same locale.

Chapter Five - Proposed New Structure

There have been a number of proposals for restructuring of the global UMC in response to the possibility of schism over LGBTQIA+ issues. Many of these were due to be presented to GC 2020 which was postponed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Due to vaccine inequity and visa and travel issues, this has now been postponed several times and is currently slated to occur in spring or summer of 2024. For the purposes of this paper, those legislative items submitted for 2020 are the only ones which will be considered here.

Brief details of each of these plans is given below. It is not certain at the time of writing which of these plans will still be offered at GC 2024 or whether new ones will emerge before that meeting takes place.

Next Generation UMC

Next Generation UMC legislation begins with the vision of a reformed United Methodist Church that welcomes everyone into full participation in the life and ministries of the church, addresses the systemic issues of the current institution, relentlessly focuses on making disciples of Jesus Christ, and equips our members to live as salt and light in the world. Reclaiming the spiritual zeal and creativity of our Wesleyan heritage, with its union of both the evangelical and social gospel, this legislation empowers United Methodists to move into the future with new vision, missional alignment, and self-determination.⁷⁵

This legislation aims at leaving the global UMC intact while simultaneously removing the harmful language from the BoD and offering workable opportunities for new expressions of Methodism to be created. It will achieve this by denouncing the Traditional Plan currently in place (since the special called GC of 2019) and creating a commission which will work on

⁷⁵ UMC Next, "UMC Next Generation Legislation Overview," Legislation, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230325163811/https://umcnext.com/legislation/>.

guiding the church into the twenty-first century. It would allow CCs options to be more fully included in the UMC or to carve out their own way going ahead. The legislation proposes that conferences, clergy, and local congregations will have the vote and say in deciding which direction they would like to go.

In addition, the legislation proposes a moratorium on charges and trials which relate to LGBTQIA+ exclusion following the closing of the GC (2020). Financial considerations for funding new breakout denominations as a result of this proposal would be provided by grant application to GC. A new special commission will be created to work on a new constitution and governing process.

The proposal includes the creation of the US as a regional conference which would be similar in operation to the CCs, thereby giving it autonomy in being able to have a BoD which is tailored to the culture of its geographical space.

New Denominations of United Methodism

We envision the UM Church birthing new expressions that will share a common heritage from the roots of Methodism, unbound from the conflict that has decimated the UM Church. These new expressions, though separate, will continue the rich heritage of the Methodist movement as currently expressed in the UM Church while being freed to present the best of who they are and their respective witnesses for Christ unhindered by those with whom they have been in conflict. We will send one another to our respectively defined missions and multiply as each expression reaches its mission field. In doing so, we will love one another even in the midst of our sharp disagreements. We will release one another to joyful obedience to Christ's call on our lives.⁷⁶

This proposal would create a number of new global denominations which are tailored specifically towards their theology with the existing UMC continuing and being renamed as

⁷⁶ Various UMC leaders, "Draft Basic Provisions of an Indianapolis Plan," August 8, 2019, /web/20230121185123/https://www.umnews.org/-/media/umc-media/2019/09/25/14/39/basic-provisions-indianapolis-plan-aug-2019.ashx, 1.

Centrist UMC. Any new denomination formed would need at least fifty churches or an AC in favor for it to be created. Membership of the new denominations would be decided by the local church charge conference, and it would be permitted to retain its property and assets (as well as liabilities). ACs, clergy, bishops, and CCs would be free to choose membership of any of the new or existing denominations. The CCs could become independent. Any churches requesting exit from the UMC to one of the new denominations would be required to maintain apportionments through GC 2024. Global agencies would become independent and act as public resources for any denomination.

New Expressions Worldwide

Submitted by the UM Forward team, this legislation proposes,

The United Methodist Church creates four new global denominations, each responsible for developing its own Plan of Organization. These new denominations are: Traditionalist Methodist Church, Moderate Methodist Church, Progressive Methodist Church, and Liberation Methodist Church (names are temporary placeholders until the new denominations organize and self-determine). These denominations may be in full communion with each other and part of a global convention or worldwide Wesleyan Communion.⁷⁷

This plan dissolves the UMC in its entirety and creates four new denominations, namely traditionalist, progressive, liberationist, and moderate. A transitional council would be developed to create a plan of separation. All entities (ACs, local churches, bishops, CCs, and clergy) are free to choose the denomination of their choice and local churches will retain their property, assets, and liabilities.

⁷⁷ UM Forward, "Birthing New Methodist Denominations: The New Expressions Worldwide (N.E.W.) Plan," 2019, /web/20230121185142/<https://um-forward.org/new-plan>.

A moratorium on all LGBTQIA+ related charges and trials is proposed. New denominations will decide on their own structure and systems with the general agencies becoming independent charitable organizations.

U.S. Regional Conference

This legislation is proposed by the Connectional Table and keeps the UMC intact.

There shall be a U.S. Regional Committee (“the Committee”) composed of all General Conference delegates representing annual conferences in the United States which shall have legislative function. In addition, one lay person and one clergyperson from each of the Central Conferences shall be elected by the Central Conferences or their leadership bodies and shall serve with voice and vote. This Committee shall be assigned all petitions pertaining to the operation, governance, witness, and ministry of The United Methodist Church in the United States and which are adaptable by central conferences according to ¶ 101 and per ¶ 543.7 (referred to hereafter as U.S. Region – Adaptable). The Committee shall operate in accordance with provisions enacted by the General Conference and the Plan of Organization and Rules of Order of the General Conference, as amended, to provide for the work of this Committee.⁷⁸

This proposal (the general theme of which is included in more than one of the other proposals) would require the formation of an interim committee which would be responsible for the creation of the US regional conference, giving the US similar autonomy as the CCs.

Christmas Covenant

Compiled and written by United Methodists from Africa, Europe, and the Philippines with input and support from the USA, this legislation proposes a strongly regionally defined global church:

Guided by [...] our principles and values, and recognizing that we need a new way to be in gracious relationships with one another to better fulfill the mission entrusted to us by Jesus Christ, we support the following existing legislation:

⁷⁸ Connectional Table, “Creation of a U.S. Regional Conference,” 2019, [/web/20230121185203/https://www.umc.org/-/media/umc-media/2019/12/02/21/51/usrc-petition-onlinecopy.ashx?la=en&hash=EBC9DC690112F5C036A3CB3E88DA54B57D3BA2FA](https://web/20230121185203/https://www.umc.org/-/media/umc-media/2019/12/02/21/51/usrc-petition-onlinecopy.ashx?la=en&hash=EBC9DC690112F5C036A3CB3E88DA54B57D3BA2FA).

Establish 5 new episcopal areas in Africa as decided upon by the 2016 General Conference. This [sic] proposal is from the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

Establish a United States Regional Conference as proposed by the Connectional Table (our Christmas Covenant legislation embraces and incorporates this proposal).⁷⁹

The proposal will create a US Regional committee including US delegates from GC and two delegates from each regional (central) conference outside of the US. Each regional conference will be able to define their own policies and legislature.

Summary of Proposals

Each of these proposals has some merit and value for the global church and yet each strives at retaining a systemic structure which has become unwieldy and inoperable. The very fact that we cannot meet for GC until 2024 and that everything in the church has been on hold since 2019 (including election of new Bishops and other administrative matters) has caused further pain and harm to a number of groups of people. Internalized racism, misogyny, and systemic procedures which are not only impossible to navigate but also demoralize those people willing to take them on, have all caused a decline in the church which is no longer able to address the needs of the community it serves.

A new way of thinking about how we act as Christians to our neighbors, serve them, love them, and share the good news of Jesus Christ with them must be found if the church is going to survive beyond the next few years.

⁷⁹ Various UMC Leaders, "A Christmas Covenant Our Gift of Hope: An Equitable Structure of Global Regionalism," Legislation, 2019.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20230121185357/https://www.christmascovenant.com/pagecc>.

Proposal for a New Model Based in Celtic Christianity

A new structure for the UMC based on the circles previously described as the basis of the Celtic Christian communities in the British Isles would be made up of communities that share certain attributes, are led by a combination of laity and clergy, and with an episcopacy that has no leadership role but rather was there to ordain, baptize, confirm, and join new membership, would echo this structure well and allow for a church which was less top heavy and bureaucratic.

This would produce a church which truly served the people where it was located, sharing gifts and resources around that community, and allowing for the individual gifts of both laity and clergy to be used where they were most needed. Clergy would no longer be expected to fulfill all the roles currently required of them, but rather would be able to concentrate on the areas in which they felt both gifted and called. Laity would be responsible for the running and management of their own local context and with shared decision making. No single person would have authority to dictate the direction that community would be taking.

Layers of connection circles can be added to the model as the restructure grows, allowing for networking outside the local area and resourcing larger operations and assistance where necessary as depicted in the diagrams in the next few pages.

Cells – the UMC has many cells already in place, in fact probably surplus to requirements. Many of these buildings are too large for the communities they currently house and have unmanageable maintenance requirements and a deal of functionality which is no longer used. As the conversion to this new model takes place, I envision the repurposing of many of these properties into things such as affordable and senior housing complexes, neighborhood

centers, or community gardens with outdoor worship spaces. The possibilities are limitless once we can shift the cultural thinking from being building-centric to community-centric.

Hubs – In the Cal-Pac AC, churches are divided into mission areas which are geographical locations that contain between four and six churches (cells in the new model). These would be used as the basic unit for the creation of a hub. Within that hub model, one church would be designated as the main organizational location for the hub. This building would house the administrative offices for all the cells in its area as well as any mission work that takes place outside of the current cells within that hub.

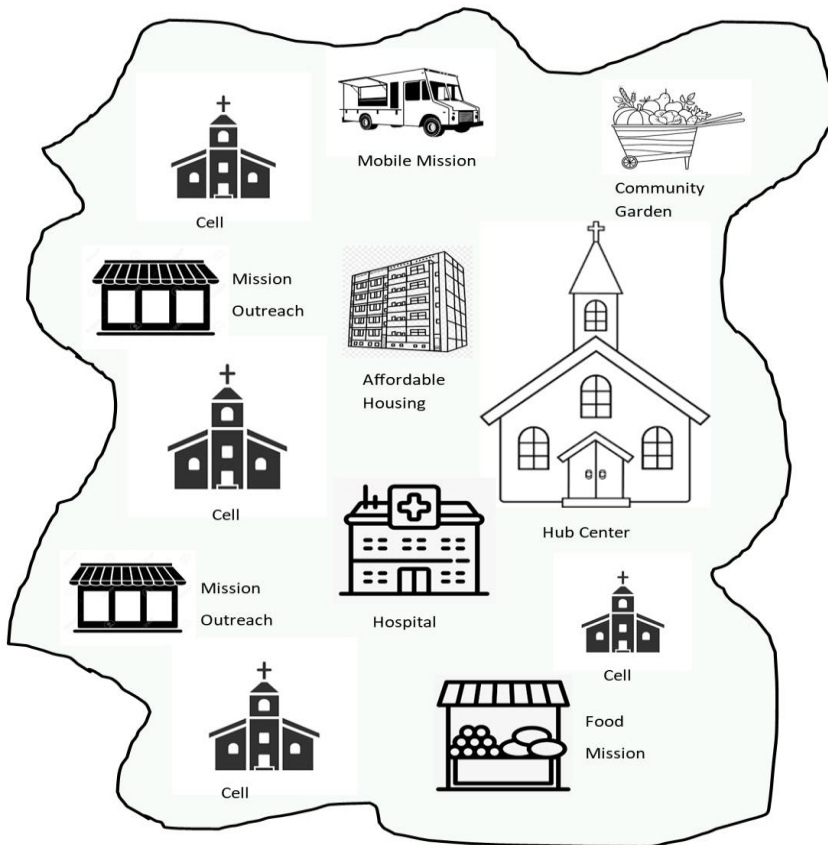
All clergy for the hub would have offices within this central hub and the work areas would be divided amongst the clergy appointed there according to their gifts and skills (i.e., pastoral care, preaching, mission management, mission development, chaplaincy, administration, etc.) There would also be office space for the laity elected to serve and manage the hub.

Leadership and management of the hub would take the form of a committee comprised of laity and clergy from across the hub. Laity would take overall responsibility for the running of the hub, be elected to serve for at least a two-year period by the communities contained within the hub, and there would be at least two leaders of the committee at any one time. Clergy would not have a vote in any matters of the hub but would be present to provide advice and counsel and have input on all matters, allowing the laity a greater role in development and management of the movement, while also allowing clergy to concentrate on their unique gifts and graces. Every unit contained within the hub would have voting representation at the organizing level (cells, missions, hospitals, etc.)

There would be no episcopal involvement in the hub, rather the episcopacy would be responsible for commissioning, ordination, baptism, and confirmation while serving a five-year term of office before returning to the clergy pool for the AC (which are retained simply in terms of episcopal geographical areas to be covered). The AC will also be responsible for the coordination and appointment of clergy (who will remain itinerant) by a laity council formed with representatives of each hub in that geographical area and called together annually for that purpose.

Funding for each hub will be pooled from each cell and used to pay clergy salaries (which are on a standardized scale and equal across gender and time served), operational costs and fund mission work. AC financial costs will be shared amongst the hubs (for episcopacy and annual meeting costs).

Hub (Typical configuration)



The diagram shows ideas for all possible entities which can be included in a hub. This includes, as previously stated, churches, agencies, non-profits, etc. but does not limit the

opportunities to just these options. As a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, people were limited to their homes for long periods of time, and many became more connected with a spirituality which they had not previously been able to express. This spirituality took on many different forms, but much of it connected people to the outdoors and to creation – rather than to organized religions contained within brick-and-mortar structures.

The hub diagram includes a mobile truck which is designed to take each of the people involved in the hub out to a location together to serve and do mission work as a team. For example, a mission trip to the unhoused community with the truck (see the SHIFT truck later on in this document) would involve loading the truck with communion elements, worship music, Bible study resources, clothing, food, licensed clinical social workers, medical practitioners, and personnel from local housing agencies.

As each hub is created and operational (see later Chapters for how the rollout will be implemented) they will be connected to adjacent hubs, strengthening their resources and impact while providing support to each other where the mission work coincides. Individual hubs will remain as the lowest level of connection and will be the primary method of operation for the entities in that cell.

Hub building and connection will be the responsibility of a small team of people who will ensure the smooth operation of each hub, maintain connections, and build new ones both within the bounds of the hubs own geographical area and with other hubs across the home AC. Thus, an AC can contain many hubs working independently and alongside each other in an ever-changing shape depending on the needs of the given communities at any given time.

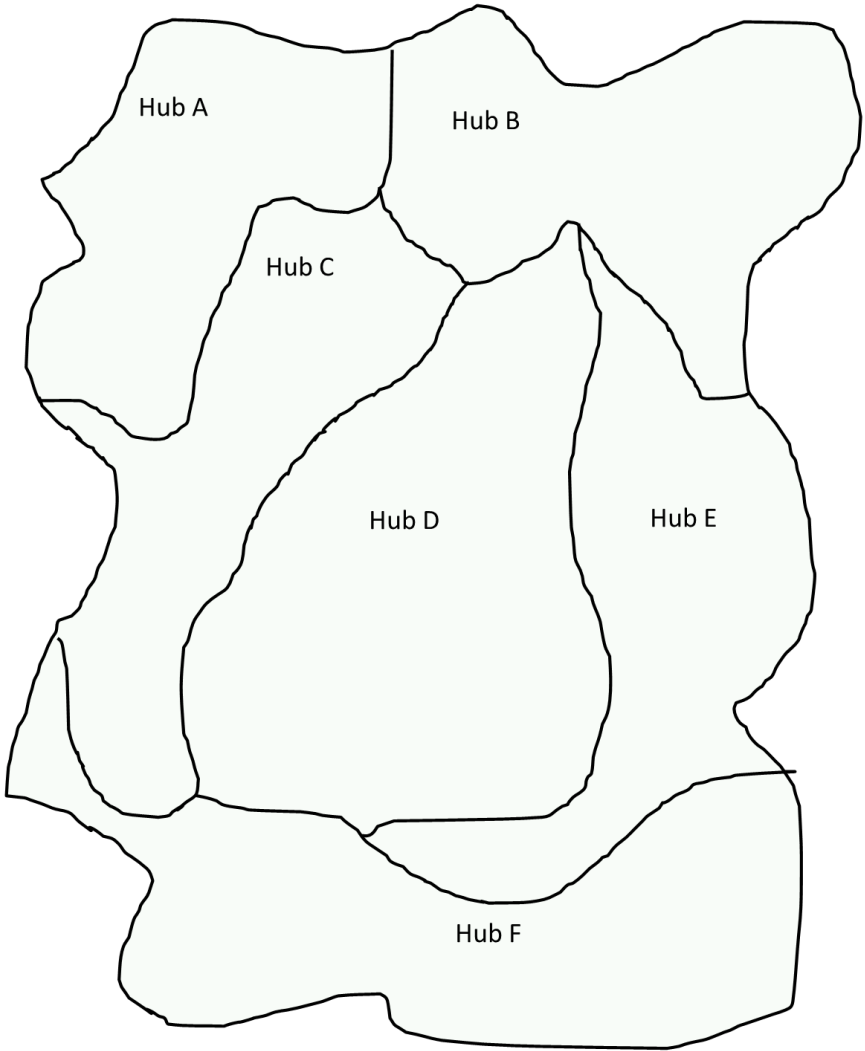
General agencies will become independent and self-funding – looking for funding sources from within the UMC as well as outside agencies. They will act as a resource in terms of training and connections for the individual hubs who will pay either an annual registration fee or on an as-needed basis.

There will be no Jud.C or CofB as they will not be required. Matters of legality will be settled within each hub individually or by a meeting of the annual conference as required (which will also be the case when deciding and voting on a new episcopal leader). JCs will also become unnecessary although connections between hubs within differing ACs will be possible and encouraged. The same goes for CCs and DCs.

There will be a centralized and agreed upon set of values, tenets, and creeds to which all members of the global church will agree and use to guide their ministry. Rules and regulations though will not be decided on a global basis for all. It will be up to each hub to figure out how they work best together and what conditions or guidelines they want to put in place in order to govern themselves. All decisions will be made by a committee with no one having greater power in terms of decision making or ruling than any other member.

Hubs will be expected to be self-funding, through membership, tithes, and fund raising opportunities. They would purchase the services of the General Agencies on an as-required basis. Ownership of assets would reside at the hub level.

Conference Hub Layout



A conference's hubs will be set as shown in the above illustration depending on the geography and demographics of a given area. Hubs need to understand the culture in which they are situated and the ways in which they will be able to connect with and serve that community in terms of spirituality, prayer, worship, mission, outreach, and community building.

The way the hubs will remain connected with each other will be through the circles that are created by connecting the mission work of the hubs across the global church. For example, if one of the missions and ministries of a local hub is to work towards ending homelessness, and an adjacent hub were undertaking similar work, then a connection will be made between those two hubs.

These hubs can be geographically adjacent or in a different country across the global connection. Once enough hubs are connected then a team will be formed to help manage that hub and the connections across the world to help them attain the best possible value from the resources, information, and knowledge which will be received through membership of that missional connection circles.

Hubs can be members of as many missional connection circles as they do individual missional work themselves. The pooling of resources to empower and inform hubs rather than control and direct them will make them more effective, energized, and invested in the work they are undertaking.

For example, many churches and task forces across the current global connection of the UMC are dealing with problems due to the immigration systems of the USA (and other countries). In September of this year, I was called in to help with an asylum seekers project which had run into some problems and was going to have to close down. There were, at the time,

34 people being housed in a shelter provided by the Cal-Pac conference, including offering additional services (above and beyond the mandated requirements for asylum seekers) of food, laundry, English as a second language lessons, child-care, and assistance in enrolling the children in schools.

I was given one month to locate new homes for all these people (which included many children) and this proved to be an almost impossible task. The welcome center had been a joint project between an agency, the school providing the accommodation (in halls which had been out of service and left to run into disrepair for many years,) and the Cal-Pac conference using disaster recovery funds through FEMA funding.

The agency was able to find homes for seventeen of the people whom they had introduced to the shelter. The problem came with another agency that had delivered people to the door of the center and left them there, and once contacted because of the closure of the site, refused to answer phone calls, or take any responsibility for those families.

There were many different agencies in the local area undertaking this work and each one had to be contacted individually and a new relationship formed with them before we could ask for their help or to put a pull on their own resources. This took time and pressure which was a complete drain on my resources which should have been more fairly distributed over the entire conference rather than concentrating on this one project.

Another problem exacerbating the situation was that many of the local areas were completely full as so many asylum seekers had finally been allowed through the borders after the Trump administration's holds and the COVID-19 Pandemic, which caused an extreme backlog of people in holding places waiting for assistance.

The work was intensive and long and I was finally able to connect with an Interfaith Committee in the local area who took over responsibility for the remaining families (and the agreement with the college which was extended).

Had I been able to draw on a wider net of resources across the country then I would have been more thoroughly educated, had more access to funds, and been able to find places where homes could be offered more quickly to families who had already suffered so much. Further, had we had contact with immigration resources in the countries of origin of these asylum seekers then it's possible we could have provided sponsorship prior to their departure, enabling them to transition directly into a home where they could have been settled more quickly and not had to go through the trauma of being shuffled from place to place.

Connectional Table

No individual's identity consists of a single facet and as such, the people who are being worked with by a hub will have an intersectionality that goes beyond the scope of that single hub. For example, an immigrant can be both a woman and queer or suffer from physical or mental challenges with which they need assistance. The church in general has treated each one of these areas as a silo and done little to work together with other church organizations, let alone any outside their own sphere.

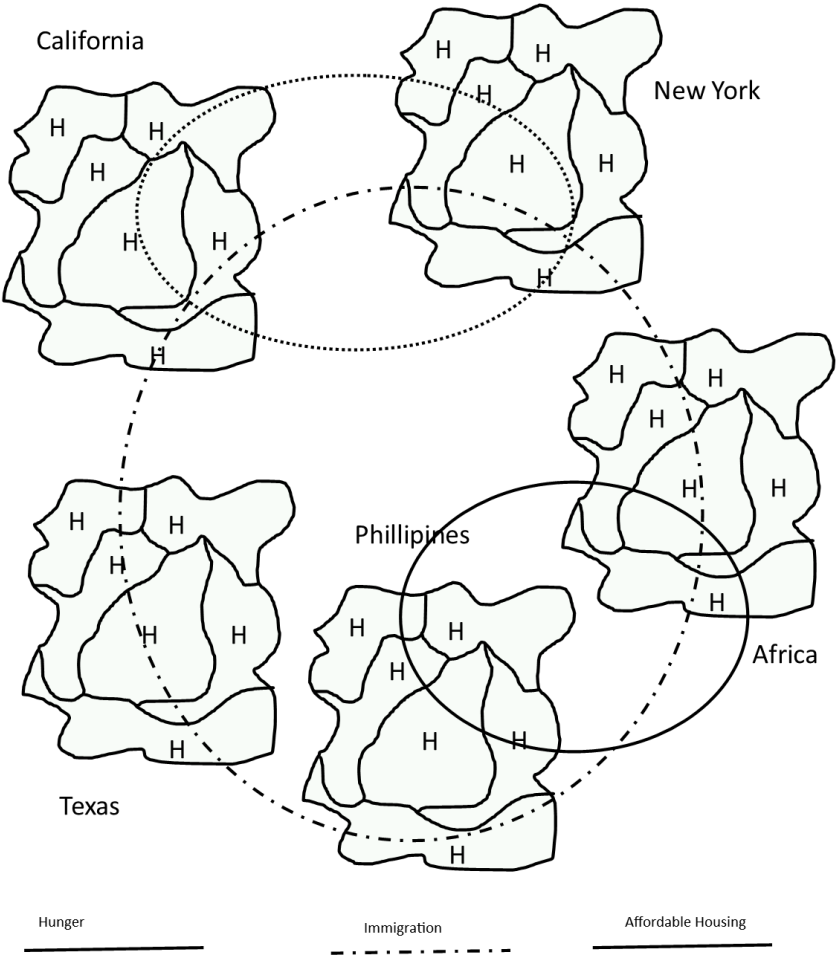
To this end, each AC will have a connectional table which will consist of members from each of the hubs and enable them to find out where the intersectionality of their work happens and how they can resource each other. Using computer-based communication tools between the hubs as well as within them will help facilitate the crossover required to address intersectionality in all areas.

Annual meetings where representatives from each Hub within an AC can get together and share ideas and resources as well as teaching each other about the work they are doing and how they can address intersectionality through a multi-faceted approach will be vital to the success of the connectional circles and hubs.

This same method can be used for both national and international hubs which would, for practicality purposes, meet less frequently than annually but, again, would use the communication tools to keep in touch with each other and cross pollinate the work they are doing. This can be done both on a single-issue hub basis (such as immigration or hunger) and then on a wider basis.

An annual meeting of connectional table representatives from each AC would allow this connectional and cross-over work to be done on a global level, as well as the local level. The agencies and resources which are now operating independently of the UMC would find this a good place through which to remain connected with and resource the global church.

Global UMC Missional Connectional Circles



Chapter Six - SHIFT Truck and Moving Forward (Next Steps)

The concept for the SHIFT truck (described earlier as mobile mission work forming part of the new structure) came about as a result of a retreat with members of the Connectional Ministries Team in Cal-Pac. Two sub-groups within that team came up with similar ideas for creating ministries which reach the people who will never come into our church buildings because of the harm done to them by organized religion. We realized that in order to reach these people who need us the most, we would have to take church to them.

Taking church **to** them meant taking all that church comprises rather than just a worship experience or a single limited outreach such as a clothing or “blessing bag” giveaway. We needed to take the entire experience with us – that meant a truck which could carry both people and supplies and resources. The SHIFT name came about because we are trying to get the church to move away from traditional practices which are building based and out into the community – so a shift in thinking and practice.

The concept for the truck is simple. Take a truck (picture a food truck type set up) to a group of people where they are located and offer services, worship, and connection to them in that place. So, for example, a visit to Skid Row in Los Angeles would involve transporting communion, simple worship, clothing, food, representatives from LA Housing, a licensed clinical social worker, legal counsel, and some kind of basic medical practitioner. A visit to West Hollywood (traditionally an LGBTQ hang out) on Ash Wednesday would involve Ashes on the Go (including purple glitter ashes), communion, details of small groups which meet in the area to discuss faith matters, local church contacts, representatives from AIDS and HIV+ health care agencies, LA Housing, etc.

Initially, the plan was made to rent a truck as we explored implementing the concept and measured peoples' reactions to the ideas we were suggesting. We got some promotional materials and launched the idea at AC. There was a very positive response as we explained to attendees our ideas and many people wanted to become engaged with the project.

We decided to run three trial events to test out the viability of the project before investing in a truck of our own. The Justice and Compassion Essential Ministries team (of which I am the director) provided funding for each of the three trial events.

Event One – “Camp On The Go”

The Camping and Retreat Ministries from the conference (which are also a part of the Connectional Ministries Team) had a similar idea for their kid's camp programs. They developed the concept of “Camp On The Go” which would take some of the camp experiences directly to the churches, set up in their parking lot and give local families an insight into the camping experience which was offered each year.

We joined forces and developed a program based at a local UMC church in La Cañada. This church has a large property with different areas which could be used for activities. Once a date was agreed on, we started to work on the layout and inclusion of other churches and agencies in the area. The camping department has an oversized bounce house which would go front and center to attract people, there would be arts and crafts outside the sanctuary and an archery range in the field behind the church. There is a large outdoor firepit with layered bench seating in one area of their campus and so we recruited a worship team who would lead songs and campfire activities in this area. The attendees would be grouped into sections and rotate around the activities – each rotation being thirty minutes long, thus providing a total of two hour's worth of activities. We also hired a food truck to provide refreshments.

I contacted all the local UMC churches, and they were keen to be involved in terms of service and resources. I also contacted the missional agencies (non-profits) from each of these communities and invited them to become involved in the project and to have a stall at the event where they could advertise their services, recruit volunteers, and even collect supplies. An interesting point to note here is that one of these churches has a very different theology to the other three and is not affirming of LGBT folx. Despite this, they were keen to be involved in the project and saw it as an opportunity to develop relationships through mission.

From here I investigated other local non-profits and government agencies which operated in the local area. I explained the concept to them and invited them to participate in the event. Not one refused an opportunity to be involved. The stalls would be laid out in the parking lot area of the church, and each had freebie giveaways, literature, and sign-up sheets. We understood that even though people did not want to attend worship in a building or be engaged with organized religion in a traditional sense, many had a heart for social justice and for community, so it was important we provided these opportunities for engagement in new and different ways.

The event was a success. There were four churches present, a dozen agencies and non-profit organizations and many youth and young adults volunteering at the different activity stations. We had a great turnout – over one hundred families engaged in some or all the activities and all reported a good time.

Evaluation of the event was performed through conversations with each of the churches and agencies involved, as well as the Camping and Retreat Ministries leadership. The four churches all reported new engagement in their mission and outreach activities as well as requests for similar events in the future. Camping and Retreat Ministries received some twenty applications for camp programs in the following year. The agencies and non-profits also reported

increased engagement in terms of both volunteers and donations. It is likely this will now become an annual event in that community. We also received three hundred dollars in donations for the SHIFT truck.

Event Two – Blessing of the Animals

I visit a local dog park regularly and meet an eclectic range of people from all walks of life. Part of my daily spiritual practices occur at this location as I walk in the early morning and commune with the divine, preparing to start my day and appreciating the gift of nature and creation in this setting. I have drafted a devotional book “Dog Park Spirituality” as I observed people and their dogs and realized the diverse ways in which we experience the divine in that place. One morning I mentioned to a fellow dog owner that I was doing a blessing of the animals at my local church and they requested that I bless their pup there and then in the park. This person is a member of the LGBT community and no longer attends church in person because of the lack of welcome and equality they have experienced. From this, another opportunity presented itself.

I contacted the local parks and recreation department who manage the park and asked them if we could schedule an event at the park one weekend. They agreed with some caution, worried about liability and parking as it is limited in that location. I contacted the non-profit which is next door to the park – an organization named “One Generation” which provides day care for seniors suffering from memory issues and dementia. They agreed we could use their parking lot on the day and requested they had a stall of their own to recruit volunteers and participants. I readily agreed and the project quickly took on momentum of its own. I contacted local shelters, groomers, and pet supply companies as well as local UMC churches in the area. All agreed to participate in the event, with the local churches providing snacks and drinks. I hired

another truck and filled it with giveaways from local stores as well as communion elements just in case!

Flyers were produced and the event advertised locally in both local press, social media pages, and the churches own newsletters. We had five churches present and stalls for ten local shelters, three groomers, a travelling canine dentist, and a non-profit company which helped with veterinary fees. We also provided a do-it-yourself photo booth for those animals which had been blessed.

The event was a success, we had around 150 dogs come to be blessed, and I served communion to some 20 people who had not been inside a church building for several years (for a variety of reasons). Each of the agencies there was pleased with the turn out and responses they received from the attendees and a few weeks later were able to report increases in both donations and volunteers. The SHIFT truck again received donations, this time to the tune of 160 dollars. The churches had received some enquiries about their mission work.

I provided a draft sampler of my devotional book and from that grew a small group of people who now meet at the park at 7am and walk together sharing their own thoughts and ideas on faith and spirituality and giving each other a new way to start and frame each day.

Event Three – Hawaii Pride

The pride parade in Hawaii takes place much later in the year than on the mainland because of the heat there. There are a number of churches on the island of Oahu which are affirming or working towards making statements of affirmation. There are also a few churches on the island whose theology is not the same, although they have members who are members of the LGBT+ community or strong allies. It was important particularly for those members to have

an opportunity to participate in the parade with others who believe as they do. Instead of a food truck, we reserved several trolleys to transport the participants in the parade due to the fact that a number of them are older and unable to walk the distance required. We also secured a table at the event location so we could distribute information and allow people to sign up for small groups and opportunities for fellowship, as well as providing a vehicle for people to engage in conversation and exploration of human sexuality as they and their churches discern the way forward for their churches in the UMC.

We made t-shirts using some of the funds created from the previous events and also with monies from the conference LGBT strategy group. We secured bottles of water and candy to be given out to parade viewers by the participants and advertised the event both locally and through conference-wide channels.

We also extended our outreach by attending the LGBT resource fair at the University of Hawaii where we worked with other faith leaders to provide engaging activities and giveaways and introduce ourselves to the community in a relaxed and fun-filled atmosphere.

The event was a great success in terms of participants. They all reported how life-giving it had been to be able to walk with and as representatives of their church and faith, particularly for members for the LGBT community. A number of sign-ups for group discussions were taken and three small groups were developed as a result of the event.

Next steps

The viability of the SHIFT truck was affirmed through these three events, and we are now fund raising to have a truck which will be available for similar events throughout the conference. There is a lot of work involved in setting up these events in terms of getting the

details of churches, their missions, and local agencies and non-profits working in similar fields of justice and compassion as the local churches.

Alongside of this work I have been developing a database which holds all this information with the idea of using it in different ways to connect all of these entities together and allow them to extend the reach of their mission work and pool volunteers and resources. This work will underpin the circular model described in previous chapters. Several events have been scheduled across the conference which will further this work and provide a vehicle for the development of relationships and connections. This project has been entitled Cooperative Connectionalism and is described as follows.

Cooperative Connectionalism

A plan for the JECMT to develop connections between local churches, agencies, and non-profits with the aim of enhancing the effectiveness of their ministry and outreach and which will serve as the creation of the first Hub in Cal-Pac.

The BoD states that the “Local church, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may enhance their witness to one another and to the world by showing forth the love of Jesus through forms of mutual cooperation.”⁸⁰

To facilitate this, a new model for the development of relationships is proposed. The benefits of this model are:

- Strengthening the ministry of all participants
- Demonstration of good stewardship

⁸⁰ UMC, *The Book of Discipline*, ¶206.

- Gift-based ministry
- Ideal training environment
 - Candidates for ministry
 - Seminary students
 - Pastors
 - Local non-profits

Requirements for participation

- Willingness to work with others and to share resources
- Desire to reach the community in life-changing ways
- Creativity
- A desire to work in the call for justice and righteousness within the current structures of society.

What it is:

- It is NOT an imposition of structure and organization from outside of the group or from the conference but rather a style of ministry. It works in ALL settings – rural and urban and can be applied to churches of all sizes and types. It works at breaking down any of the current barriers which divide people (such as race/ethnicity/gender/ability, etc.)
- It works at addressing questions commonly asked within local churches such as:
 - Can we work more effectively with others than just by ourselves?
 - Are there needs within our local community which the church does not have the resources to meet?
 - What are the issues and needs in our local community?

- How can we work with others to meet these needs (and hopes, dreams, visions etc.)?
- It is different from the ways we are used to doing ministry and can take some time to develop as we build trust between partners and learn to overcome fears and frustrations. It requires a three-to-five-year commitment and the promise of support and commitment from the conference.
- It is rewarding and helps churches to not feel isolated within their own setting. It helps develop relationships and decrease individual burdens.
- It is a collaboration between conference, clergy, and laity as well as with secular organizations.
- Each iteration or instance will be unique to those entities and local area in which they are located.

How does it work?

- The JCEMT staff will research the current ministries of churches within an area and build a database of current ministries, and those ministries offered locally by other churches and religious organizations as well as non-profits and organizations in the area. This database will be accessible to all of the above entities who wish to participate in the project.
- Current local demographic information will be explored in terms of who lives in the area, what their profiles are, what needs and wants they may have, and which social justice issues may be most relevant to them.
- District change leaders will be involved as their role is vital and they will be assumed to be the network managers along with elected laity in the first iteration of the new network.

- The idea for building these new connected circles is to be able to take a bottom-up approach rather than the traditional top-down approach traditionally used in the existing church structure. The people doing the work on the ground are the ones who know what is needed, what is working, who is missing, and what changes are needed.
- The circles are built by strengthening and improving the relationships between all of the moving parts, and particularly at the grass roots level. A key component of the operation is distributed leadership and decision making. A portion of the circle can make a decision to go a certain way without requiring consensus of the other members.
- A phased plan for the rollout is required with checks and balances along the way as the system is developed.

Phase 1:

- Collect data from the churches – use the mission coordinator contact name for each church and send a questionnaire to each on asking for details of the mission and outreach work undertaken at that campus.
- Develop an application/database which puts all of this data into searchable forms for local churches to connect with.
- Input the data received from the mission coordinators.

Phase 2:

- Roll out to churches (and agencies) with training workshops

Phase 3:

- Pilot one mission area (using the structure for mission areas already in existence in Cal-Pac)
- Using Mission Insite data to explore the demographics of the area – who is there – what is currently available – what is needed – who is duplicating work?
- Who is doing the work that we have not yet connected to?
- Connect with each church – laity and clergy.
- Connect with local agencies.
- Involve JCEMT strategy groups for resourcing and guidance.

Phase 4:

A daylong conference is scheduled where all participating entities are invited to attend. conference staff and JCEMT Strategy Groups are also present as resources.

The following guidelines will be used to define who will be invited to the event:

- “Principles of IDEL (inclusion, diversity, equity and liberation) working group
 - Inclusion means everyone is invited to sit at the table.
 - Diversity means that everyone at the table is representative of different experiences, identities, socioeconomic locations, etc.
 - Equity means that everyone gets food at the table.
 - Liberation means that the food they get is according to their needs (halal, kosher, etc.) and they enjoy (according to tastes, likes, etc.).⁸¹

The program for this day will be as follows:

⁸¹ Blueprints for Change, “Blueprints for Change Progressive Organizing and Campaigning Manual,” November 1, 2019, <https://blueprintsfc.org/manual/>.

1. Introduction
2. Trust building exercise
3. Short presentations from all entities
4. Relationship building exercise
5. Presentation on local area demographics
6. Lunch – with a “getting to know you” activity included
7. Small groups – led by Strategy Groups –
 - a. Participants select which group they join based on their area of interest.
 - b. Developing connections and exploring ways in which they may be able to start working together.
8. Final session on how-to next steps – system in place from conference to assist in tracking and keeping the process moving forward.

JCEMT strategy groups will be responsible for supporting and assisting in the development, running, and evaluation of each iteration which arises from the conference. Procedures for this are TBD.

Activities on these events will include:

- a. Map Drawing, different colored post-it notes to denote each type of organization, which participants will take, label with their name, and use to plot a current network map with lines between them.
- b. Include post-it notes for those known identities who are not present
- c. Circles around the edge for those mission areas which are not represented in the map.

- d. Answer the questions: What do you notice? Is there a large enough core to get started? Is there a type or organization which is predominant? Are the people being served in the network? What would add most value if they could be added?

Phase 5:

- Future review and further development.
- Meeting quarterly to review the network and explore who is missing, whether the periphery needs expanding, potential triangles which need closing, development of leaders, reflection, and analysis of what is going well and what needs work.

Throughout each phase, the development of a communications hub for the network will be given priority. A database will be created and maintained, available to all network members.

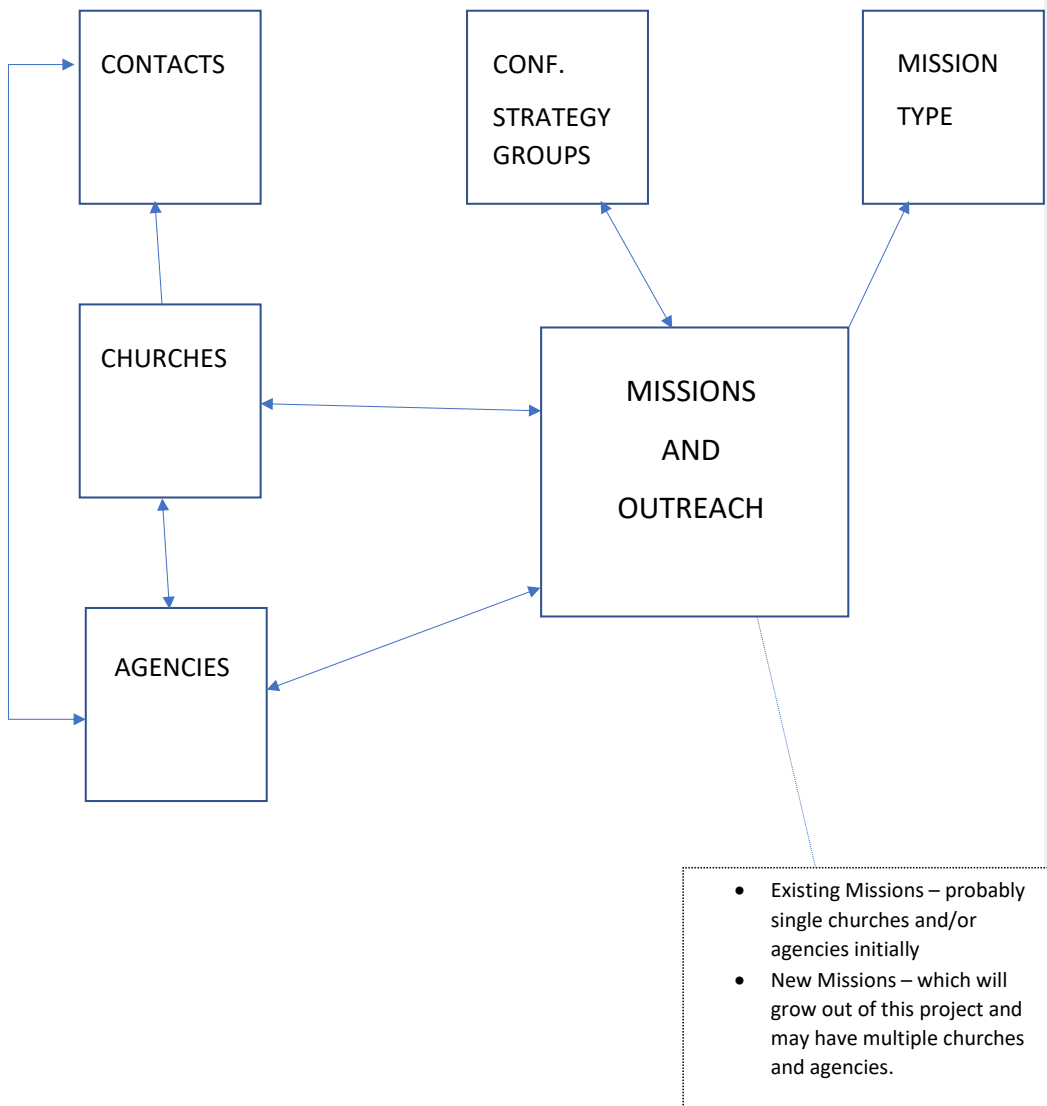
Communication is key because,

Networked coalitions create impact by pooling their members' skills, expertise, experiences, services and other resources. This allows individuals members to mobilize resources they would have otherwise been unable to access if they were operating alone, whilst also saving the overall network time and money. Networked coalitions therefore need systems in place for identifying the resources, assets and capacities that reside within them, tapping these existing capabilities and filling any gaps that may exist. The most successful 'system' is a highly interdependent set of relational connections that allows organizations to know each other and their assets.⁸²

This communication tool must also include feedback mechanisms and change management which is available for all members so that ideas are distributed across the entire circle.

⁸² Blueprints for Change, 14.

Database Model



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